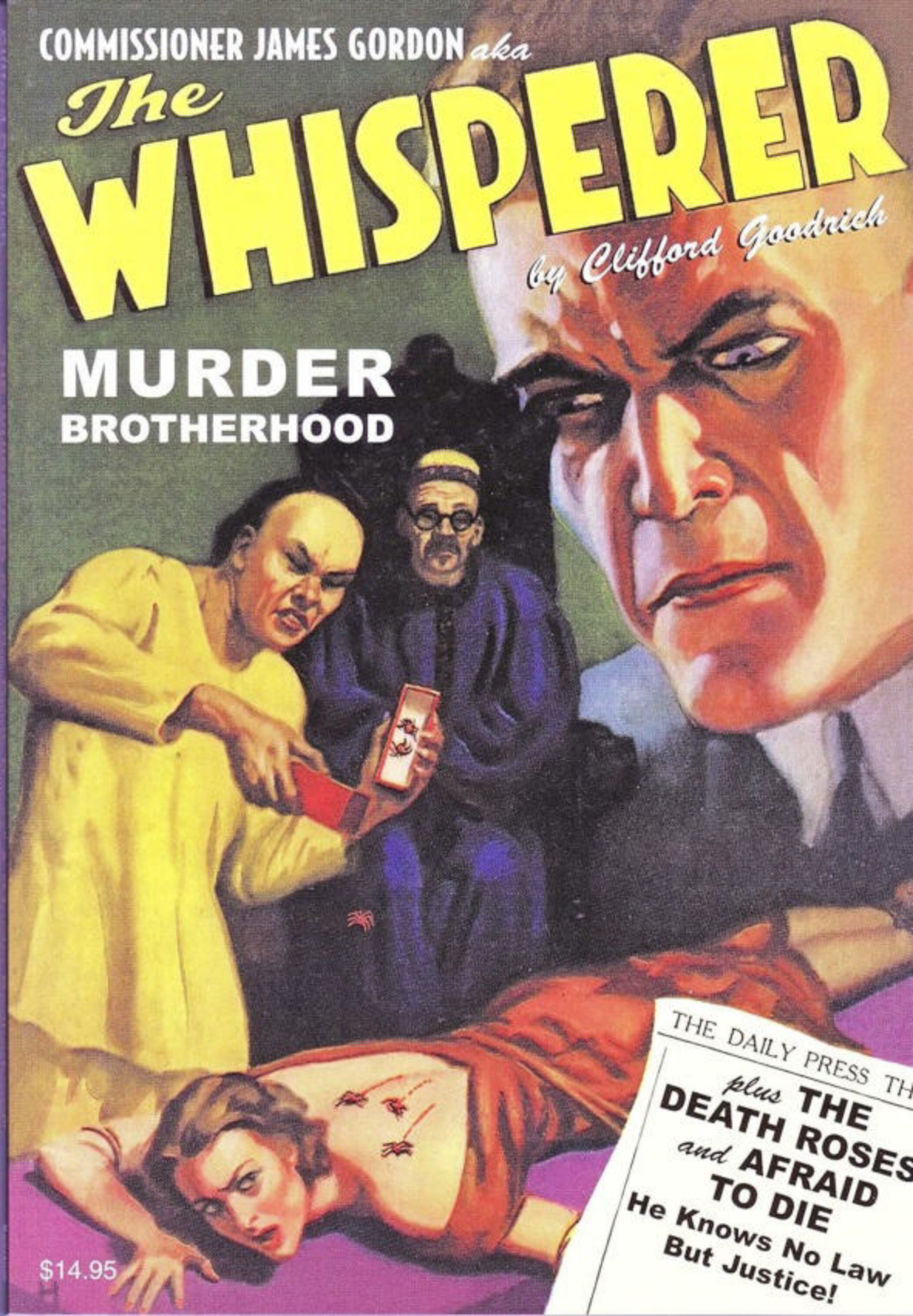
COMMISSIONER JAMES GORDON *aka*

The WHISPERER

by Clifford Goodrich

MURDER BROTHERHOOD



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The WHISPERER

by Laurence Donovan and
Alan Hathway writing as Clifford Goodrich

plus illustrated adventures of
THE WHISPERER and NORGIL THE MAGICIAN

and a new historical essay
by Will Murray

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FOUR AMAZING ADVENTURES OF THE GRAY WRAITH

The WHISPERER

Volume 7

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Thrilling Tales and Features

THE DEATH ROSES by Laurence Donovan (writing as "Clifford Goodrich") 4

INTERLUDE by Will Murray 52

MURDER BROTHERHOOD by Laurence Donovan (writing as "Clifford Goodrich") 54

AFRAID TO DIE by Alan Hathway (writing as "Clifford Goodrich") 107

HE KNOWS NO LAW BUT JUSTICE illustrated by Gus Ricca 114

NORGIL AND THE LION by Walter B. Gibson and Jon Small 121

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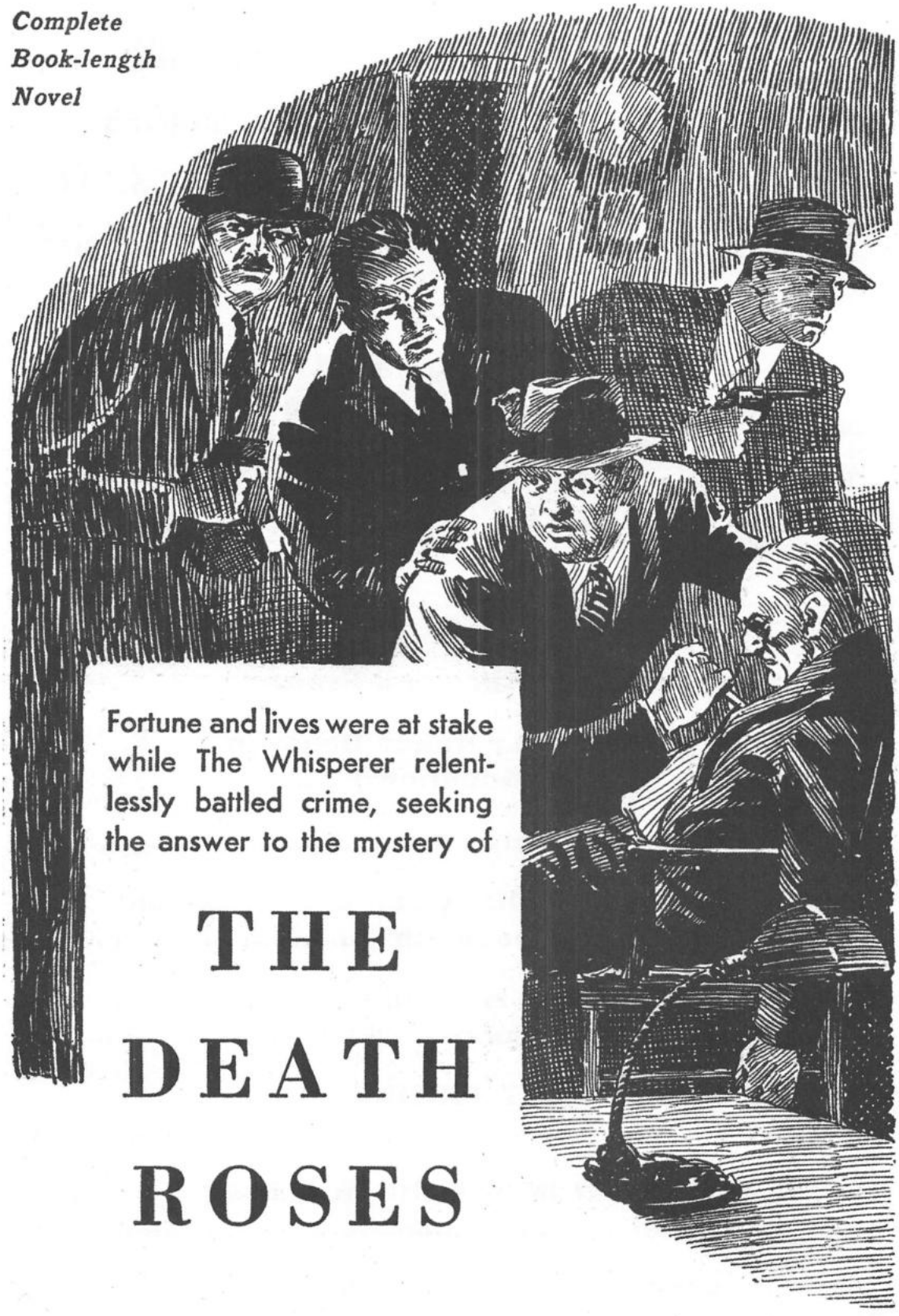


Fortune and lives were at stake while The Whisperer relentlessly battled crime, seeking the answer to the mystery of

THE DEATH ROSES

By CLIFFORD GOODRICH

From the police reporter's room came a piercing, hissing voice.

CHAPTER I
FOUR IN A MURDER

"YOU'D kill me? Ho! Ho! A great joke, Phineas! A good one! In ten days, maybe in ten hours, I'll be dead! So you'll never find out!"

Lannis Jacklin, ex-convict, could only squawk hoarsely, His words and his laughter were confident, but they came from indrawn lips tinged occasionally with flecks of blood.

Lannis Jacklin rubbed his thumb caressingly over an unsightly brown mole under his left eye. His thumb flicked the coarse, black hairs growing in the blemish.

The ex-convict was shrunken to a skeleton. His face had the pallor of prison years upon it, and another pallor. This last, as he had said, was of the death only ten days, perhaps ten hours, away.

"That means you'll go to your grave with the secret of this injustice on your soul?" said his visitor. "You think I came here to kill you. Perhaps I did. You're determined then, Lannis, you'll die without telling?"

Lannis Jacklin's visitor was a man perhaps in his sixties. His mended, scrupulously neat clothes indicated he once had been a man of dignity and standing. Now his body was shrunken and old, a little like that of the ex-convict he had come to interview.

The visitor had given his name as Phineas T. Hoyle when he had gone into the outlying precinct police station to visit with Lannis Jacklin. Hoyle had the air of a professional man, perhaps a lawyer of the old school, now eking out a bare living.

No doubt, Phineas T. Hoyle could see that Lannis Jacklin, ex-convict, was speaking the truth. Nothing could be accomplished in the killing of a man whose open grave already yawned before him. Yet Hoyle became purposeful in his demand that Lannis Jacklin should divulge some secret the ex-convict seemingly had decided to carry with him into that grave.

Suddenly the voices of both old men, for Jacklin, also, was old, became high-pitched. Their first words had not been heard outside the small room in which they sat. This was an unused police reporters' room at the police precinct station.

Contrary to police procedure, no representative of the law was listening in on the strange conversation. Nor was there apparently any police officer in position to see what transpired between Lannis Jacklin and Phineas T. Hoyle.

Only two men outside the police reporters' room could hear the first murmur of the old men's voices. They heard also the rising anger in the tones of the pair. At this apparent dispute in the police reporters' room, one of the men outside glanced at the other.

THE man looking for a possible order to interfere was wooden-faced. His eyes were slaty and without emotion. The wood in his square face might have come from a battleship.

He was Detective Sergeant Tom Thorsen. He had once served in the army. And he never made a move without a direct order.

The man to whom he looked now for the possible order did not have the appearance of being a member of the police. A droop-brimmed army hat was cocked jauntily over one eye; it almost covered eyes that might have been gray, or they might have been blue. They had the color of the Texas winds and sun, Texas eyes.

Those colorless, steady eyes have been known as a mark of Texas law enforcement officers since the days of the Texas Rangers.

A necktie, so red it offended good taste, was looped under a loose collar. A flaming, fresh carnation was in the buttonhole of a bright blue serge suit.

In keeping with the rest of this flamboyant attire, a pair of vividly yellow shoes reposed on the desk of the precinct sergeant.

This man now said, "Never mind, Sergeant Thorsen. We will pass up this Phineas T. Hoyle. There will be other visitors. Let Lannis Jacklin have his death reception undisturbed."

Sergeant Thorsen's fingertips unconsciously snapped to his right eyebrow.

"Yes, sir!" he said, briskly.

For the man with the cocked army hat and the crimson necktie was none other than Police Commissioner James Gordon. "Wildcat" Gordon to those who knew him best, to those who knew the five feet five inches of fighting fury that made him a little less than medium size.

Police Commissioner Gordon did not remove his yellow shoes from the desk. The high words in the police reporters' room, to one side of the sergeant's office, droned to whispers. In perhaps five minutes, the old lawyer, Phineas T. Hoyle, came out.

The time-worn attorney looked as if he had aged several years since he had entered the room with Lannis Jacklin, ex-convict. His face was deeply wrinkled with worry. He walked heavily with a stout, black cane.

Police Commissioner Gordon showed little apparent interest in the departing visitor. But from another room two detectives emerged. They had their instructions to keep Phineas T. Hoyle in sight.

As Hoyle departed, Lannis Jacklin was left alone in the old reporters' room. He was sitting, his scrawny body sunk into a deep chair. For several minutes after the departure of Hoyle, he did not move.

Sergeant Thorsen would have looked into the room, but Commissioner Gordon made a negative gesture with his head.

"I said there would be other visitors, and here is one now," said Wildcat Gordon. "This is more likely something with a string attached."

The second visitor was a bright-looking young woman. Too bright, and too hard-looking. She wore a yellow dress that matched her thick, bleached blond hair. She looked at Sergeant Thorsen with a pair of eyes that might have been hard, green agates.

When she gave her name, the syllables were indistinct. Wildcat Gordon snapped his fingers and Sergeant Thorsen did not request the young woman to repeat. She was permitted to go, unaccompanied, into the police reporters' room where Lannis Jacklin waited.

Again, this was contrary to police routine. The door was closed behind the young woman. Perhaps the greeting between the ex-convict and the hard-looking bleached blonde was in subdued tones. Wildcat Gordon and Sergeant Thorsen heard what might have been a faint cry from the girl.

Half a minute passed. Then the girl came hurrying out. One hand was clutching nervously at the bosom of her dress. She seemed to want to shake off the atmosphere of the police station as quickly as possible.

THERE was a wait of perhaps ten minutes before another visitor for Lannis Jacklin appeared. Sergeant Thorsen arose and glanced into the reporters' den now being used as a queer reception room. He saw the ex-convict seated, motionless, his pointed chin sunk a little on his breast, as if he were half sleeping.

In Lannis Jacklin's buttonhole was a red rosebud. This was wilted, its small leaves turning brown at the edges. The ex-convict had kept it there, as if he had not been aware that this red rosebud was responsible for his presence here, for this strange reception of visitors, which Wildcat Gordon had called a "death reception."

As in the case of Phineas T. Hoyle, two quiet-footed headquarters men had followed the hard-looking young woman in the yellow dress. Lannis Jacklin possibly did not know this shadowing of his visitors this evening was to be a part of his reception.

Or did he? This Lannis Jacklin was a queer figure. He had been picked up because of the most trivial circumstance. That red rosebud in his buttonhole. For, in the past ten days, other men had been wearing red rosebuds.

The records showed it had been just ten days since Lannis Jacklin had been paroled from the State prison. He had served fifteen years of a thirty-year sentence. He might have served more, but the convict was dying, and he had been paroled to die.

Now Lannis Jacklin might have crawled, unmolested, into some underworld hideout and have passed away, scarcely noticed by the police. But in the ten days since he had walked from the gates of the big house, there had been two murders. Two murders that might have been commonplace

enough, if it had not been for torn, red rosebuds.

Crushed, red rosebuds, found by the police beside the bodies of two night watchmen at storage warehouses. In each of these warehouses where personal goods were stored, the killers had ransacked the rooms in which trunks were stored.

Many trunks had been broken open. There was evidence that the murders had been committed by more than one man. The evidence had indicated there must have been at least half a dozen killers, engaged in the quest that appeared to be directed at discovering the contents of stored trunks.

But in each murder there was a red rosebud.

Then, the already dying Lannis Jacklin, ex-convict, had been found on the street. He had been attacked, struck over the head, perhaps left for dead.

But in his buttonhole was a red rosebud.

Had other men, wearing red rosebuds, attempted to kill Lannis Jacklin? Jacklin, who had been buried for years, almost forgotten.

There was some evidence this had not been such an attack. The dying ex-convict's pockets were found turned inside out. A ring had been torn from one finger. No, it seemed that Lannis Jacklin thus came into the hands of the police by a whim of fate.

Whatever Police Commissioner Gordon may have thought of all this, he had sent Jacklin over to the precinct station. And by Wildcat Gordon's direct order the ex-convict was holding "open house" for such few old friends as might have remembered and wanted to clasp his hand in the few hours, or days, before he died.

This was the word that Wildcat Gordon had caused to be put out.

Now two visitors had come and gone from the precinct station. If there were some connection between Lannis Jacklin and this murderous red rosebud gang, the commissioner might soon know about that.

THE third visitor for the "open house" of the "death reception" arrived. He limped in and offered to Sergeant Thorsen the very common name of John Smith, which meant exactly nothing.

But he had two odd characteristics that brought instant gleams into the slaty eyes of Sergeant Thorsen.

This John Smith was deformed. He had a high, grotesque hump on his right shoulder. His hair was long, and his face was obscured by a grayish-black beard.

But it was not this oddity that caused Sergeant Thorsen to flash a glance at Wildcat Gordon. Wildcat's expression did not change in the slightest. The commissioner pushed a fresh wad of cut plug into his pipe and lighted it.

John Smith went into the police reporters' room. Sergeant Thorsen saw Wildcat Gordon arise and walk from the front door of the precinct station into the night.

The oddity both had seen about this hunchbacked John Smith was a hairy, brown mole under his left eye. It was in exactly the same spot as that on the left cheek of Lannis Jacklin. And the hunchbacked John Smith was wearing a fresh, red rosebud in the buttonhole of his neat and stylish suit.

As John Smith entered the room where the ex-convict sat. Sergeant Thorsen's quick glance assured him the ex-convict had not moved from the deep chair in which he had been sitting. And as that door closed, Wildcat Gordon already had disappeared outside.

The expression on Sergeant Thorsen's wooden face was unchanged. This former army sergeant never questioned the sometimes inexplicable actions of the police commissioner. That was why he was virtually second in command in the department, though he rated only as a detective sergeant.

The precinct desk office had been cleared during the strange "open house" being conducted by Lannis Jacklin. Other officers attached to the station were in the gym and the locker rooms. With Wildcat's departure, this left Sergeant Thorsen, alone, to guard the door of the old police reporters' room.

Sergeant Thorsen had been commanded to see that Jacklin was undisturbed while conversing with his visitors. Since the high words between the ex-convict and the first man, Phineas T. Hoyle, there had not been so much as a murmur of voices. True, the girl of the hard, green eyes had apparently cried out as he had greeted the dying ex-convict.

Sergeant Thorsen could not now hear the hunchbacked John Smith talking inside the police reporters' room. The sergeant wondered if the hard-looking girl could have once been a friend, perhaps the moll, of the paroled convict. He decided she could not have been old enough for that in the years before Lannis Jacklin had gone up to the big house.

John Smith passed perhaps three minutes with Lannis Jacklin. Sergeant Thorsen thought the hunchback opened the door furtively, appeared as if he wished to hasten away.

"No matter what happens," had been Wildcat Gordon's strict command, "Jacklin's visitors are to be permitted to leave. The boys will look after them."

So Sergeant Thorsen, against his better judgment, allowed the hunchbacked John Smith, with the brown mole on his left cheek and the red rosebud in his buttonhole, to walk out without questioning. Two more headquarters men, Sergeant Thorsen knew, would be picking up the trail of this John Smith outside.

WILDCAT GORDON had not returned when another visitor, the fourth, entered. Sergeant

Thorsen was surprised that this fourth man should be here, asking to see Lannis Jacklin.

For he was Martin Mudge, ace mouthpiece of the higher-powered racketeering section of the underworld, and a shyster attorney who had long been a thorn in the side of the police.

Mudge's small, black eyes glinted from rolls of fat in his round face. He was corpulent and overfed in stomach and purse..

"Hello, Thorsen!" he said. "Well, old Jack's one of the boys who helped give me my start. Heard he was about to kick off, and thought I'd look in to see what I might do."

Martin Mudge never looked in on anyone to see what he might do, except for a stiff price. Sergeant Thorsen knew that. But he motioned toward the reporters' room and growled, "In there!"

Martin Mudge let out a wheezy laugh and walked into the room. The door closed. Sergeant Thorsen could hear the other boys about the station jollying each other back in the gym and the locker room.

Two detectives had heard Martin Mudge enter. They looked in upon Sergeant Thorsen from a side door. Thorsen nodded. Whether it were Martin Mudge or Mayor Van Royston himself, anyone visiting with Lannis Jacklin tonight would be well shadowed.

Again, Sergeant Thorsen listened for voices. He thought he heard Martin Mudge's heavy, fat tone. But the words were lost. Apparently, Wildcat Gordon had casually left the precinct station, vanished from the vicinity.

With all his loyalty to his jaunty chief, the commissioner, Sergeant Thorsen could not understand what all this mysterious "open house" for Lannis Jacklin might be getting the department. The sergeant judged it might have some indefinite connection with the red rosebud murders, but what he did not know.

The two detectives were waiting to trail Martin Mudge, just as the three preceding visitors had been trailed. Then Sergeant Thorsen thought he heard a grunted oath from inside the reporters' room where Jacklin and Mudge must be talking.

Sergeant Thorsen started for the door, just to make sure everything was all right. Before he reached it, every light in the precinct station went out. Darkness came with a silent suddenness, which proved a switch must have been pulled.

Thorsen got to the door of the reporters' room and pushed it open. He could hear the two detectives close behind him. Then the three coppers halted, as if transfixed.

From the police reporters' room came a piercing, hissing voice. It was a whisper, but such a whisper as might have been heard at a great distance. It struck the human ear with appalling penetration.

"Lannis Jacklin is dead! That is finished. He has had one visitor who did not give his name! I am the Whisperer!"

One of the detectives shot a flashlight ray past Sergeant Thorsen. Its beam struck full upon a strange and unbelievable scene.

Martin Mudge's hand was on a stiletto thrust through the heart of Lannis Jacklin, ex-convict.

CHAPTER II
THE PLIGHT OF MR. MUDGE

THE WHISPERER!

The name, that piercing, hissing voice were enough to bind Sergeant Thorsen and the two detectives temporarily to the floor.

The Whisperer!

That terror of the underworld! The strange, gray figure that never seemed to be more than a whispering voice!

The Whisperer!

Wanted by the police for numerous acts of violence outside the law! Yet a ruthless figure that had mysteriously aided the law from time to time!

But here, in this police precinct station? It was unthinkable! Sergeant Thorsen snapped out of his temporary shock. His broad, blunt hand whipped a gun from its holster. The revolver waved before him, its aim following the beam from the detective's flashlight,

But if The Whisperer really was more than an eerie voice, it was not apparent. Sergeant Thorsen's slaty eyes went to Martin Mudge and the figure of Lannis Jacklin, the ex-convict, seated in the deep chair.

Lannis Jacklin had taunted one man, Phineas T. Hoyle, who might have killed him. For it was true that Jacklin had but a few days, or hours, to live.

But Lannis Jacklin now was dead because of a stiletto, thrust with unerring skill, directly through his heart. And that was murder!

And there was the smart Martin Mudge, high-powered lawyer and mouthpiece of the rackets, with his hand upon the hilt of the murder weapon. He seemed to be rubbing his fingers along the handle of the needle-pointed knife. At the same time, Mudge's other hand had torn open the shirt of Lannis Jacklin.

"Get The Whisperer!" jerked out Sergeant Thorsen, as he crossed the room with long strides. Then he grasped the arm of Attorney Martin Mudge.

"For the love of Pete, Mudge, what're you doin'?" rapped the sergeant. "Lay offa that knife—sit down! What did you see?"

The two detectives had covered every inch of the small reporters' room with their flashlights. There was a sudden, hoarse laugh that might have

come from a tongue without vocal cords. The Whisperer's voice again.

"So Lannis Jacklin knew something, Martin Mudge! What is it he knew?"

Martin Mudge's fat face was white under the beam of a flashlight. It became whiter then. For the electric light bulbs flashed on. There was a sound as if the wind had blown a door shut.

One of the detectives crashed across the small room, to a rear exit leading toward the police shower room. The detective pulled himself back on his heels, swearing.

"Locked!" he grunted. "Locked! With the key and the bolt both on the inside! So he didn't go through there!"

It was apparent The Whisperer had been in that small room. In the room with the murdered Lannis Jacklin and the now white-faced Martin Mudge. But when the lights came on, The Whisperer was not present.

Martin Mudge swiped a fat hand across his dewy forehead.

"Whew! What an experience!" he gulped. "The Whisperer! You think it could've been him who got old Jack?"

SERGEANT THORSEN instantly ordered the two detectives to search the station. He was convinced they would not find The Whisperer. It seemed equally certain The Whisperer could not have departed from that room after Thorsen and the others had entered.

Martin Mudge was a portly man. His black eyes were nearly always half closed in his fat face. They were half lidded now as Mudge gave a nervous laugh.

"Whew, Sergeant Thorsen! That was some jolt! So that's The Whisperer we have been reading about?"

Sergeant Thorsen was looking at the body of Lannis Jacklin in the deep chair. The sergeant appeared to be slow-thinking. But there was a remarkable brain behind that square, wooden face.

"We'll leave The Whisperer to the boys, Mudge!" snapped Sergeant Thorsen. "You'll be telling me first why you pushed that sticker into a fellow who would have passed out on his own, maybe tomorrow or the next day?"

"Don't be foolish!" grunted Mudge, some color coming back into his face. "I know I shouldn't have touched him, but as I came into the room I thought old Jack was asleep! Then I saw the hilt of that damned stiletto! I opened his shirt to feel his heart!"

Sergeant Thorsen's slaty eyes went icy; he was looking more intently at the body of Lannis Jacklin.

"And then, Mudge, I suppose you pulled off his shoes and socks to see if he had corns?" he rapped out. "And—"

The sergeant had walked closer to the seated body. He bent his gaze on the thin, pallid face of Lannis Jacklin.

"Maybe you pulled off that brown mole, too, Mudge? Or didn't you know he had a hairy mole under that left eye, where now there is only a white spot? You sit right there, Mudge, while I see if the commissioner's gone back to headquarters!"

Martin Mudge started to bluster suddenly.

"Say—what the hell are you trying to do, Thorsen? Put this bump-off on me? That con was dead when I walked in! You get your Wildcat Gordon and he'll have brains enough—"

"Brains enough to put you in a cell until you explain, at least, why you made an effort to get the fingerprints off that stiletto!" spoke a cold voice. "When you want to feel a man's heart, Mudge, you don't begin by taking off his shoes! And how about that brown mole?"

IT was the voice of Commissioner Wildcat Gordon himself. Army hat cocked jauntily over one eye, yellow shoes shining, the commissioner was suddenly standing behind Sergeant Thorsen.

"What in the hell are you talking about, Gordon?" exploded Attorney Mudge. "I told you what I was doing! That ought to be sufficient, from me!" Attorney Mudge put a great deal of emphasis on "me!" No doubt, he believed that as the senior member of the famous criminal law firm of Mudge & Carron, his own personality should carry any explanation he might choose to make.

"Sergeant Thorsen, you will have Mudge put in a cell!" snapped Wildcat Gordon. "See that he is thoroughly frisked, and report what you find!"

"Put me in a cell, Gordon? Lock me up?" roared Attorney Mudge. "Just who the hell do you think you are? Maybe you think I'm one of the crumbs you can kick around! Let me on that telephone! If Mayor Van Royston hears—"

One of Wildcat's hands slapped across Mudge's shoulder. It did not seem to be much of a slap, but Mudge sat down with an abruptness that made the chair squeak.

"For twenty-four hours you call no one, Mudge," stated Wildcat Gordon, calmly. "You and Toby Carron, your partner, have been in my hair for a long time. Now, you're going to a cell until I look over the situation. Sergeant Thorsen, you may write the charge as suspicion of murder."

Sergeant Thorsen's wooden face showed a slitted grin. The blustering Martin Mudge went back to a cell in the old precinct station. Two minutes later, Sergeant Thorsen reported back to Wildcat Gordon.

"We frisked him from his oily hair to his toenails and found nothing but a couple of habeas corpus writ blanks, Commissioner. He didn't even have that brown mole. Say, Commissioner, that's damn funny!"

Wildcat Gordon was looking intently at the pallid face of the dead Lannin Jacklin. It was indeed funny that a round, brown mole filled with coarse, black hairs should have been removed when a man was murdered.

It was even stranger that no surgical operation had been required. For there was no blood. Where the brown mole had been under the ex-convict's left eye was now a circular spot of dead-white skin. This was whiter than the rest of the prison pallor, the paleness of sudden death.

Sergeant Thorsen was considerably bewildered. More than the murder, the disappearance of the brown mole, the apparent fact that Lannis Jacklin had been thoroughly searched, was on his mind.

"Commissioner," he said, "before you came in, Jacklin had still another visitor. The Whisperer has been in here! The boys have given the whole station a raking over, and there isn't a trace of how he came in or got out! He was in this room when we caught Mudge with his hand on that sticker!"

Wildcat Gordon smiled grimly. He flicked an imaginary spot of dust off his blatant, red necktie.

"I heard The Whisperer as he passed out," he said, calmly. "But I didn't get a chance to see him. Sergeant Thorsen, you will see that no person is given an opportunity to talk with Attorney Mudge."

LESS than half an hour later, Commissioner Wildcat Gordon had his yellow shoes parked on the polished desk of his own office at headquarters. From under the brim of his slanted army hat, the police commissioner was surveying a strutting figure who wore gray spats and a tall silk hat.

"You've been unconventional in too many things to imagine you can get away with this!" the silk-hatted man was fuming. "They tell me you have Attorney Mudge locked up and that you have refused permission for even his partner here, Toby Carron, to see him! It is unthinkable that a man of Mudge's standing in the community should even be connected with suspicion in the killing of a worthless derelict, an ex-convict like this man Jacklin!"

The speaker was none other than Mayor Van Royston, elected on the reform ticket. The mayor was always going to or coming from a reception.

He had been hastily summoned from a political dinner tonight by the excited and raging partner of Attorney Martin Mudge.

This partner, Toby Carron, foppish in dress, with a patterned waistcoat, was biting savagely at one thumbnail. He was a young man to be a partner of Martin Mudge. For Mudge's criminal business, perhaps Toby Carron's small, gimlet eyes offset his youth.

"I agree with Mayor Van Royston, Commissioner Gordon!" said Toby Carron in a highly sarcastic tone. "It's unthinkable that my partner should be held, even that it should be suggested he had anything to do with the murder!"

"Meaning," said Wildcat Gordon, mildly, "it is unthinkable that Martin Mudge hasn't been able to break out of one of my little jails with one of his famous writs. Perhaps I don't believe Mudge committed the murder, and perhaps I do.

"If he did, it is the first time I ever knew one of you rotten legal tricksters to have the guts to push his own knife. You usually pay one of the boys for doing that."

Toby Carron bit into his thumbnail. He looked to the indignant mayor for sympathy in this insult.

Mayor Van Royston said, "Gordon, you will have Attorney Mudge released! Your fantastic police methods have gotten us nowhere! I am told the famous Whisperer himself was in that precinct station tonight! What is the death of one piece of scum, like this Jacklin, compared to the job of getting The Whisperer? I want every available man on the force to be put on that without delay!"

Wildcat Gordon slowly pulled one petal from the red carnation in his buttonhole. He grinned genially.

"We'll get The Whisperer in good time," he said, speaking to the mayor as he might have spoken to a child. "You put me in this office to clean up the city. In twenty-four hours, your friend, Attorney Carron here, can go before Judge Kyley and perhaps bond can be arranged for his partner."

"Kyley?" blustered Toby Carron. "Kyley!"

Mayor Van Royston swung around, his mouth dropping open. Wildcat Gordon continued smiling cheerfully.

NONE in the big city but knew the reputation of Judge Patrick Kyley. There was reason for Wildcat Gordon's grin. Judge Kyley was noted for his hatred of gangsters, racketeers and crooked lawyers.

If he could have had his way, Judge Kyley would have had a few hundred members of his own legal profession where they belonged, behind the bars with the crooks they knowingly helped to continue in profitable crime.

As a police magistrate, Judge Kyley seldom fined a man for being drunk. Or for betting on the races. Judge Kyley himself occasionally put an odd dollar on the ponies. But if a man had used a gun, or robbed with a weapon, or there was even good moral suspicion that he might, there was no limit to the amount of bail bond Judge Kyley would fix.

"Judge Kyley?" said Mayor Van Royston. "Well, I believe the mayor of this city still has some influence. I'll call Judge Kyley right now and have this matter fixed up!"

The silk-hatted mayor strutted across the office. Wildcat Gordon contemplated his shoes in all their yellow splendor as the mayor picked up the telephone. But the call was not made.

The door of the commissioner's office pushed open.

"Commissioner Gordon!" rumbled a thick voice. "They got that blond dame, an' she wasn't any blonde! Murphy got a slug in the arm an' went to the hospital!"

One of the headquarters' first-grade detectives stepped into the commissioner's office. A blood-soaked bandage was tied around his head. One of his square ears had been almost torn off.

"Yes, sir, an' they conked me!" added the detective.

Wildcat Gordon's yellow shoes came off his desk.

"The girl who visited Lannis Jacklin, huh? Who got her, and where?"

Mayor Van Royston did not then call Judge Kyley. He was listening to the story of Detective Hanagan who, with Detective Murphy, had trailed the hard blond young woman from the precinct station after her visit to the ex-convict.

CHAPTER III
THE ABDUCTED BLONDE

WITH the exception of the mysterious Whisperer, the visitors to the murdered Lannis Jacklin offered a variety of possibilities. That Commissioner Wildcat Gordon knew something of these possibilities was apparent.

No doubt, Mayor Van Royston would have believed it wholly possible that his tough commissioner of police might deliberately have framed the murder of the ex-convict, if he had imagined it would have helped in the solution of some other crime.

Wildcat Gordon did not frame the murder. That had been an unexpected development, just as had been the visit of Attorney Martin Mudge and the appearance of The Whisperer.

But Wildcat Gordon had made sure that each of those who talked with Lannis Jacklin would be closely shadowed. The hard, bright blond girl in the yellow dress might herself have used that stiletto. Certainly, a young woman of her apparent brand must have had some purpose for visiting the dying convict.

Two of Wildcat's best detectives were close behind the taxicab in which the bleached blonde departed from the police precinct station. Hanagan and Murphy were prepared for a trip over to the river side of the city.

Young women with that type of hair, green eyes and yellow dresses did not often frequent the better uptown section. But the taxicab in which the blonde was riding did not go in the direction of the underworld section of the city.

"Bet the dame's got herself a setup in one of them exclusive parkside apartments," growled Detective Murphy, as their car trailed the taxicab into a better-class neighborhood.

The two hard-boiled dicks were due for another surprise. The taxicab turned into one of the best boulevards. Then they saw that the side and rear curtains of the taxicab had been drawn.

"Say—you don't suppose we're being played for a couple of chumps?" growled Detective Hanagan. "Didja see anyone else in that cab when the dame climbed in?"

Murphy gave assurance the girl in the yellow dress had summoned the taxicab as it was cruising by. He sped up the police car and got close on the tail of the taxi. Doing this, he used an old trick of keeping close to the sidewalk curb.

Anyone glancing back would have imagined the following car was parked.

ANOTHER jolt for the detectives came when the taxicab pulled up in front of a modest brownstone front that proclaimed itself to be a young women's boardinghouse of one of the most moral of institutions.

Murphy and Hanagan stopped their car. They climbed out and approached the taxicab nonchalantly, walking apart from each other. Suddenly, Murphy looked over at Hanagan. His Irish partner's mouth was gaping open.

They had seen the bleached blonde in the yellow dress get into that taxicab. The cab had never been out from under their eyes. Now a young woman got gracefully out and paid the driver.

The girl ascended the steps to the exclusive women's boardinghouse. She was wearing a neat, blue dress, quiet in tone. Fluffy, brown hair protruded from under a stylish hat.

Murphy and Hanagan stood for seconds with their lower jaws dropping. This young woman was

as sweet and demure as any girl who might be expected to reside in an exclusive women's boardinghouse.

Before the residence door had closed, Murphy and Hanagan were on the running boards of the taxicab. A grinning driver said, "Hell, I didn't beat no lights!"

Murphy jerked open the cab door. He kicked a paper bundle on the floor. A yellow dress and a bleached blond wig rolled out.

"Say—you see that dame do a quick change?"

"Which dame?" smirked the driver. "I don't see nothin', so I get good fares. Maybe the other one wasn't a dame."

"What other one?" shouted Murphy.

The taxicab driver chewed thoughtfully. Perhaps he judged he had talked too fast.

"Aw, I was just kiddin' yuh," he growled.

"Blah!" yelled Murphy. "He's a smart guy! We were watchin' that cab all the time!"

Murphy and Hanagan both believe they had been. But tangles in big city traffic are very confusing.

A meek, gray-haired woman opened the door of the brownstone house. She gazed with awe at the police badges.

"Why, yes—yes, sir," she said. "Miss Andrews, Miss Maralyn Andrews just came in. She's a good girl. She's been here two years, ever since her father disappeared. I knew her family and they were good people. My goodness! What's happened?"

Detective Murphy had parked the yellow dress and the bleached blond wig under his coat. "How about her wearing these to go see an ex-con, lady?"

"Why, dear me, she had them when she went out, mister! She said—why, she said she was taking them to a friend! Her friend, she said, was—"

The gray-haired lady was interrupted by a piercing scream; then another, more stifled. There was the sound of a blow, a scuffle of feet.

This came from the broad stairway leading up from the front hallway.

MURPHY and Hanagan went up the stairs shoulder to shoulder. The screams were not repeated, but as the detectives reached the dimly lighted upper corridor they saw two men carrying a woman's body.

It was apparent why the screams had ceased so abruptly. The woman's head had been caught in the folds of a thick blanket. The woman had not been knocked out, for slim, nicely curved legs were kicking, as the victim attempted to free herself.

"Drop 'er, you mugs!" shouted Murphy, bearing down on one of the men with his revolver.

Murphy did not shoot this man or any other. Intent only on the apparent abduction of a woman, neither detective had looked around as they hit the upper hallway.

Now they had only glimpses of at least four other men. Murphy did recall afterward that at least two of these men were wearing red rosebuds in their buttonholes. At this instant, he forgot everything. The metal butt of a pistol sliced down across his forehead.

Somewhere in a doorway, another man was making certain there would be no pursuit down the back stairway. He was using a submachine gun. The upper corridor suddenly became filled with the viciously screaming slugs.

One of the bullets caught Murphy high in the shoulder and whirled him around as he was already falling from the effect of the blow on the head. Another slug nicked Hanagan's ear on the inside, burning his skull and making him see nothing but red.

That sent Hanagan to his knees. When he could get up, the woman and the men who had seized her were gone. The gray-haired woman was crying and wringing her hands. She said there had been two closed cars in a side street.

WHEN Murphy and Hanagan came around, and a squad car had arrived, the gray-haired woman recalled that two of the upstairs abductors had been wearing red rosebuds in their buttonholes. Confirmation of this came with the discovery of a crushed, red rosebud on the floor.

It was quickly ascertained that Miss Maralyn Andrews, she of the taxicab and the police precinct visit, was the abductor's victim. Apparently, she had been seized before she could have changed from the clothes she had been wearing.

Hanagan, reporting all this to Commissioner Gordon, said the rosebud gang must have been trailing the girl when she visited Lannis Jacklin in his death hour.

Wildcat Gordon took a long pull at his stubby pipe.

"Yes," he said, "the rosebud crowd was trailing all of those who visited Jacklin."

Wildcat stated this quietly, as if it had been expected. Mayor Van Royston ceased his pacing, long enough to stare at his police commissioner.

"You knew that, Gordon, and you didn't have those gangsters brought in!" he shouted, his retreating chin bobbing in and out.

"I knew it, Mayor," repeated Wildcat, calmly. "Also, I suspected there would be a visit from The Whisperer."

Toby Carron, Mudge's partner, blinked his small eyes at Wildcat Gordon. Carron had a mean, small

face for a man. He constantly gnawed at one thumbnail.

"I think, Mayor," stated Canon, "that this grabbing of the girl and the appearance of this so-called rosebud gang makes it imperative that my partner be released, at once, on his own recognizance, without bail!"

"There isn't a doubt of it !" snapped Mayor Van Royston. "I'll fix it with Judge Kyley at once!"

Wildcat Gordon said, "I wouldn't trouble, mayor; it has already been fixed. I have informed Judge Kyley of the amount of bail that should be demanded, and I am exercising the privilege of keeping Martin Mudge in custody for twenty-four hours before arraignment."

TOBY CARRON swore vehemently. Mayor Van Royston stared at Wildcat Gordon. In the political setup of any large city, the mayor is assumed to have the last word. In the case of Wildcat Gordon, Mayor Van Royston frequently had the last word, but that was all.

James Wildcat Gordon had been a former officer of the regular army. Later, as a first-grade detective, then an inspector, he had cracked some of the city's toughest crime cases wide open. Mayor Van Royston's own reform party had demanded the appointment of Wildcat Gordon as police commissioner.

The mayor had several times attempted to bring about Wildcat Gordon's resignation. Each time, some big case had been broken under the mayor's patrician nose. Again and again, The Whisperer, notorious foe of crooks, but offender against the law, had appeared.

The Whisperer had always seemed to be on hand when some mysterious crime baffled the police. Just as he had already appeared at the police precinct station when Lannis Jacklin had been murdered.

Wildcat Gordon now ignored Mayor Van Royston and Toby Carron, speaking to Detective Hanagan.

"You are sure there was no other woman, or man, in that taxicab with Maralyn Andrews when she left the precinct station?"

"Hardly possible, Commissioner," stated Detective Hanagan positively. "I tell you the girl came out and hailed a cruising taxicab!'

"Yes?" mused Wildcat Gordon. "Taxicabs have, however, been known to be cruising in convenient places."

Mayor Van Royston

CHAPTER IV
ANOTHER RED ROSE MURDER

MAYOR VAN ROYSTON could be very unpleasant. He usually was abetted in this by a bulky man with a hooked nose, a low forehead and a mouth too small and round to belong to a man.

This man was Deputy Commissioner Henry Bolton. Henry Bolton had hoped to wear the commissioner's shoes, when Wildcat Gordon had been appointed. He had been favored by the mayor, but the mayor's own political supporters had settled that issue by demanding Wildcat Gordon.

"You've got to get Martin Mudge out of this!" asserted Mayor Van Royston. "It's clear enough this girl, Maralyn Andrews, murdered the ex-convict. A stiletto is a woman's weapon. Besides that, what is all this mystery, this crazy scheme of having Lannis Jacklin receive visitors? Just who is this Jacklin?"

"When I can answer that question, Mayor, I'll lay the whole case before you looking like a busted nut," said Wildcat, ironically. "The real identity of Jacklin was one of the things I was trying to discover."

Deputy Henry Bolton put in, unpleasantly, "Perhaps you should get in contact with The Whisperer? It wouldn't be the first time that murderer has given you secret information!"

"Now, Henry," stated Wildcat with a grin, as if the idea struck him as very good. "I hadn't thought of that. It's just what I shall do—get in touch with The Whisperer."

At this moment, a slightly stooped, bald-headed man entered the office. He peered at the occupants nearsightedly, from under bushy eyebrows. He walked with a slight limp and seemed to hesitate about intruding.

He was Dick Traeger, known on the force for many years as "Quick Trigger," because of an itching gun hand. Though in his sixties and retired from a deputy commissionership, Quick Trigger was immensely valuable to Wildcat Gordon.

In fact, Quick Trigger had been almost a father to the hard-bitten Wildcat Gordon. Wildcat resided in the penthouse of old Quick Trigger, atop a waterfront loft building. "Tiny" Traeger, a small girl with dancing devils in her eyes, made up the household. Tiny was the granddaughter of Quick Trigger.

QUICK TRIGGER showed by his manner he had news for Wildcat. The commissioner dismissed the others from his office. They departed reluctantly. Toby Carron paused in the doorway.

"I'll have Martin Mudge out of jail in two hours or I'll have your job, Gordon!" he declared.

Wildcat Gordon carefully pulled off a petal of his red carnation and flicked it in Carron's direction as his only reply.

"Now, Quick Trigger?" he said to his lifelong friend.

"I guess I wasn't doin' so good havin' you fix that frame-up on Lannis Jacklin," said the old man, humbly. "It didn't seem to work out so well. I've been down to the morgue an' seen the body. Wildcat, I've found out something important."

Quick Trigger never could be hurried. Wildcat grinned at the old man.

"Listen, Wildcat," said Quick Trigger. "I was right about this Lannis Jacklin, anyway. And you might as well pick up this fellow Phineas T. Hoyle. I reckon he had every reason for removing Jacklin from off the Earth. I'm thinkin' maybe Phineas T. Hoyle went in with them red rose fellows to get Jacklin."

Wildcat Gordon already was on the telephone. Perhaps he had recalled the conversation that had boiled over in the precinct station room. The high words he and Sergeant Thorsen had heard. In half a minute, he had picked up the detective detail shadowing Phineas T. Hoyle.

The report showed that the two detectives were camping on an old office building, in the lower district of the city. They said Phineas T. Hoyle had an office in the building they were watching. They had seen the old lawyer, hobbling along on his stout, black cane, enter the building and his office more than three hours ago.

"He's still there," stated one of the detectives. "He turned on the light when he went in. No one has come out, and the light is still burning."

Wildcat Gordon made an instant decision. He glanced at Quick Trigger. It was now after midnight.

"Run along and have Tiny keep the coffee hot," said Wildcat. "I think I shall look into this Phineas T. Hoyle matter personally."

With quick orders, Wildcat Gordon sent additional men to the ancient office building. He had ordered it staked out, front and rear.

"Let no person enter, or leave!" was the order.

A FEW minutes later, Wildcat himself slid from under the wheel of his roadster. A few seconds later, he satisfied himself that this was the character of building in which an out-dated, rundown lawyer would have an office.

Window signs showed marks of age. The musty offices were occupied by notaries and legal has-beens, who made a bare living with small civil matters. The office of Phineas T. Hoyle was on the third floor, far back toward the alley. The sign read:

PHINEAS T. HOYLE
Attorney at Law and Notary

The window glass of the door had not been washed in a long time. The light inside etched traceries of dust on the pane.

Closely followed by two plainclothes men, Wildcat Gordon reached this door. He paused a few seconds to listen. There was no sound from within, though the light was burning.

"Maybe the old man went to sleep," suggested one of the detectives. "Looked to me like he could hardly make it up the stairs with that cane of his. He's got a game leg, and he's pretty old."

Wildcat tapped on the door glass. There was no response. He rapped harder. Still there was silence. The door lock had been snapped on the inside. Wildcat rapped the third time.

Then he rammed a fist expertly through the dirty glass of the door. As the broken pane fell out, before Wildcat had turned the lock on the inside, the two men behind him gasped.

"Great guns!" exploded one. "Wouldja look at that now? He must've took an awful beltin'!"

Wildcat strode inside and over toward the battered wooden desk. There was no doubt but the big man lying across the desk had taken what the detective had said, "an awful beltin'!"

Blows must have been rained upon the man's skull, beating in the bone.

The man's face was almost unidentifiable. The nose had been broken and the forehead caved. On the floor lay a stout, black cane. The same cane that Wildcat had seen Phineas T. Hoyle carrying earlier that evening when he had visited Lannis Jacklin.

It seemed unbelievable that a feeble, old man could have used the heavy cane as such a vicious murder weapon. But the pieces of the cane were sticky with blood and hair. The hair was black, like that of the dead man on the desk.

"Have a slant at this, Commissioner!" directed one of the detectives.

The dead man's right hand was doubled under his body. His fingers were set on an automatic pistol. The man had apparently been given no chance to use his weapon.

Wildcat might have imagined the big fellow had been taken by surprise from behind, but every blow struck with that cane had been rained with vicious force upon the face and forehead of the corpse.

"Phineas T. Hoyle may be a feeble, old man," stated Wildcat, "but I'll say he did a passable job of defending himself. And that gun makes it self-defense, the best we could do with it. You boys get out and start the others on the prowl. Without his cane, I don't believe Hoyle could have got far away."

Left alone with the body, Wildcat made a quick

job of investigation. The big man had been dead for perhaps an hour. But it had not been the manner of death that had riveted Wildcat's interest.

On the floor was a crushed, red rosebud. The broken stem still clung on a pin in the lapel of the dead man's coat.

Phineas T. Hoyle

WILDCAT stepped back, looking at the bloody face. Because of its gory condition, he had almost overlooked a point that now hit him with amazing force.

Under the left eye of the corpse was a round spot of dead-white skin. Wildcat got down on his hands and knees. In a minute, he found and picked up the brown patch. It looked remarkably like a brown mole. A mole filled with stiff, black hairs.

Wildcat put the patch under his pocket microscope. He whistled softly. For the brown mole was really human skin! The black, coarse hair had grown to it. But on the underside was the definite trace of some form of glue.

It was like the mole that had been removed from the cheek of Lannis Jacklin. And the microscope showed faint traces of some kind of thin paper having been attached to the mole skin underneath.

Before the arrival of the homicide squad, Wildcat made a hasty inspection of the office. He saw then that Phineas T. Hoyle must have departed with no intention of returning.

Dusty filing cases had been pulled out; papers had been hastily removed. There were scuffed spots on the dirty floor where bags had been picked up. But near one of the filing cases, Wildcat saw a rolled paper so old it had become as brown as parchment.

He was bringing this under the light when a voice spoke softly.

"Tiny's put on the coffee, an' I thought maybe you wouldn't mind me trailing along."

Old Quick Trigger shuffled in, peering at the paper in Wildcat's hand. Quick Trigger's deep eyes seemed very nearsighted. Yet, amazingly enough, at a distance of several feet, he read the traces of ink on the paper in Wildcat's hand.

"I reckon, Wildcat, that's a will made out some twenty years ago, accordin' to the way I fix dates," said Quick Trigger.

The paper that had been dropped was indeed a will. Its contents brought a whistle to Wildcat's lips.

"Twenty millions is a lot of money in any man's language," he stated. "A lot more twenty years ago than today. You wouldn't think this Phineas T. Hoyle ever had anything to do with that much money."

Old Quick Trigger smiled modestly.

"But that's what I've been tryin' to tell you, Wildcat. If you can only add up what Phineas T. Hoyle once was and what this Lannis Jacklin could have told before he got stuck through the heart, I suspect you might have a lot of millions."

Wildcat pulled his army hat over one eye and grinned. Old Quick Trigger's ways of stating his conclusions were sometimes bewildering. He was reading the dim lines of the will.

"Twenty millions in negotiable bonds, cash and real estate is here bequeathed by Burton Sedrick Andrews to his dear wife, Sarah, and to his infant daughter. Maralyn—"

Wildcat broke off with a snapped, "Hellamighty, Quick Trigger! Now we're getting somewhere! Maralyn Andrews, the girl the rosebud gang grabbed! And it says here that Phineas T. Hoyle is named sole executor of the estate! Names him as the trusted family attorney! We've got to find this girl, Maralyn Andrews!"

"The one who came to see Lannis Jacklin, and whom Mayor Van Royston was trying to put on the spot as the ex-convict's killer?" said Quick Trigger.

"Maralyn Andrews, I said," repeated Wildcat. "But I'm not so sure she came to see Lannis Jacklin. Hoyle was after something under the brown mole on Lannis Jacklin's left cheek. He got something from the same kind of a mark on this dead man here. We've got to pick up Hoyle, find Maralyn Andrews and a man with a hump on his back giving the name of John Smith."

"After which, you'll come and get the coffee Tiny's keeping hot," suggested Quick Trigger. "Your boys haven't picked up Hoyle, but I'd make a guess he didn't get far away."

QUICK TRIGGER vanished as Wildcat Gordon summed up the situation. Perhaps the corpse in Hoyle's office had been one of the red rosebud gang. The brown mole, a fake, removed from his cheek, definitely linked him with the murdered Lannis Jacklin. Hoyle had had plenty of time to push a stiletto into Jacklin's heart.

Wildcat recalled that the girl in the yellow dress and the bleached blond hair had hurried out of the room after she had gone in to see Jacklin. The Andrews will was evidence enough the girl knew Phineas T. Hoyle.

Possibly she had sent him to see the ex-convict.

Then who was the hunchback with the grayish-black beard, who had given the name of John Smith?

He, too, had hurried furtively from the room in which Lannis Jacklin had been discovered to be dead.

It looked as if Attorney Martin Mudge had been telling the truth. He could have found Lannis Jacklin already dead.

In pairs, Wildcat's men reported there was no trace of Phineas T. Hoyle in the vicinity. Wildcat suddenly prowled into an alley at the rear of the Hoyle office building.

The alarm was out for Maralyn Andrews. No report had come from the men sent to trail the hunchback, John Smith. Now it seemed Phineas T. Hoyle had committed what might have been his second killing, then disappeared.

Wildcat wore a hard grin. When all of these facts were assembled before Mayer Van Royston, that pompous executive would have plenty of legitimate cause to demand the resignation of his uncontrollable police commissioner.

There was little light in the alley back of the office building. One faint electric light bulb showed a car entrance. Wildcat walked through this circle of illumination. He was a natty figure, with his quick, snappy steps, his red necktie and the red carnation glowing in his buttonhole.

Perhaps Wildcat, at the moment, did not think of how much his crimson buttonhole bouquet would resemble a red rosebud. Anyway, the commissioner halted suddenly. The cause of this was a black cat.

Whenever a black cat crossed Wildcat's path something was due to happen. It was not always bad luck, either.

This cat leaped to the top of a high, board fence. There was a small space behind the fence, which doubtlessly concealed garbage and ashcans. But that would be no reason for the black cat acting as it did.

The black cat let out a wild squawk. It teetered a few seconds on top of the fence; then it darted down and back the way it had come. No dog had barked. Wildcat had heard nothing move behind the board fence.

The commissioner pushed a broken board loose and peered into the unsavory darkness. His eyes caught a huddled lump lying across upset garbage cans. From the huddled lump came low, agonized moans.

CHAPTER V
THE WHISPERER AGAIN

WILDCAT GORDON'S flashlight quickly showed the moaning bundle behind the board fence was Phineas T. Hoyle. His position had prevented his being discovered by the other men. Above him, on the third floor housing his office, a window was partly open.

Perhaps fearing he was closely pursued, Phineas T. Hoyle had attempted to jump from the window. In fact, he had jumped. A scarlet trickle over one wrinkled temple showed where his skull might have been cracked.

A broken leg was doubled under the old lawyer's thin body. Looking at him, it seemed almost impossible that he could have beaten in the skull of a bigger man armed with a gun. Wildcat suspected the first blow with Boyle's cane had been a complete surprise to his visitor.

The visitor of the brown mole? Of the red rosebud? What had he expected to get from Phineas T. Hoyle after his visit to Lannis Jacklin?

Wildcat had it. Whatever might have been under the brown mole removed from Jacklin's left cheek. For his flashlight now showed Hoyle's right hand to be gripping a piece of thinnest paper. Wildcat unlocked the fingers.

Under his flashlight, faint pencil tracings showed on the paper. It had been folded several times. A sticky substance proved it must have been concealed under the brown mole. There was a crude drawing.

This showed two tree stumps with a growing tree between them. Nearby was a rock and a circle sketched in as a lake. Printed words appeared in the finest writing.

> LINE UP ROCK WITH TREE BETWEEN STUMPS. WALK SIXTY-ONE STEPS TO COPPER PEG IN GROUND ACROSS LAKE—

Wildcat stared at the thin paper and exclaimed, "Hell! That's only part of it! That other brown mole! Perhaps both of the other moles!"

This strange remark was elicited by the condition of the crude, miniature map. For it had been neatly torn in the center. That which it showed had little meaning. More information would be required to follow such a queer cryptogram.

The location of the supposed lake, of the tree, of all of the objects in the drawing was not given. Perhaps that would be supplied by the other half of the little map.

Wildcat considered all of this swiftly. Had the other half of the map been under the mole on Lannis Jacklin's cheek?

Apparently whoever had killed him had not known it was there, or had not been given time to remove it. For the body of the dead ex-convict had been thoroughly searched; even his shoes had been removed.

Martin Mudge had been detected groping inside the dead man's shirt. Or might that not have been merely a trick? Wildcat was now convinced that either Martin Mudge or one of the other three visitors to Lannis Jacklin had the remainder of this map.

A QUICK search did not reveal it on the person of the unconscious Phineas T. Hoyle. Wildcat was sure it would have been there, if he had taken it. There were several other legal documents Hoyle had removed from his files.

Wildcat Gordon did not delay to examine these. At this moment, he might have been expected to summon his squad men. He was aware some were already upstairs examining the body of the murdered man.

A curious smile crossed Wildcat's square jaw. His Texas eyes glowed suddenly, like those of a cat in the darkness. His next movements were decidedly out of keeping with the dignity of a police commissioner of a great city.

Wildcat's army hat came off with a folding motion. It vanished inside his shirt. The red necktie and the red carnation were removed. Wildcat tossed the discarded carnation over the fence. His blue serge coat was pulled off and reversed. His creased trouser legs suddenly changed from blue to an indeterminate gray.

Wildcat touched what looked like zippers on his bright, yellow shoes. The shoes lost their outer brilliance. They were of dull gray, like his suit. A whitish powder blurred his reddish-brown hair. A flopping brimmed hat went over this hair.

Last of all, Wildcat slipped curiously shaped dental plates into his mouth. His chin seemed to become long and pointed. His upper lip was lengthened and projected. Wildcat used no mirror to survey himself. He only spoke.

In the alley darkness a voice whispered. An eerie, chilling sound, as if a tongue had shaped words without the resonance of vocal cords. But the whisper was penetrating.

Wildcat Gordon, police commissioner, had stepped behind the board fence.

The Whisperer, none other, was preparing to depart.

The Whisperer, the despair of the police department, the killer feared as much among crooks as among honest men.

When The Whisperer moved, his feet were sure. The shoes, now a blurred gray, had ground-gripping soles. With these, The Whisperer could perform remarkable feats of movement.

And in the shadows of the alley, the gray contour of The Whisperer was not even a shadow behind the fence. Now he bent and got Phineas T. Hoyle's limp body into his arms. Perhaps the old lawyer had but a short time to live. Perhaps he never would talk.

But The Whisperer had decided that if he did speak, he would be the first to hear what Hoyle might have to tell.

This had been the secret of The Whisperer's appearance in the reporters' room where Lannis Jacklin had been murdered. He had passed out through the very door through which Sergeant Thorsen and two detectives had entered. And he had no more than walked around an end locker until he had reappeared as Commissioner Wildcat Gordon himself.

So, perhaps The Whisperer knew a great deal he had not divulged of what had taken place in the room where Lannis Jacklin had died. For he must have been there when Martin Mudge apparently was handling the stiletto in the ex-convict's heart.

However, The Whisperer now had determined on one bold stroke. He would remove the broken Phineas T. Hoyle from possible interference by the regular police, his own men.

CARRYING Hoyle over one shoulder, The Whisperer moved to the broken board in the fence. He paused to listen. There was no sound. Unfortunately, The Whisperer had been unaware where the red carnation from his buttonhole had fallen. He had tossed it into the alley.

The buttonhole flower made a little crimson splash under the electric light bulb in the black alley. And another man had seen that bit of bloody blossom. He had come into the alley, crouching near the building.

As the red carnation fell, no doubt he mistook it for a red rosebud. The man glanced quickly up and down the alley. For several minutes, he had been dodging Wildcat Gordon's police. Now he heard The Whisperer coming through the fence, carrying Phineas T. Hoyle.

The shadowy stranger glanced again at the red carnation. Then he spoke in a hoarse undertone.

"Good work, Carney! You got him, huh! The car's up at the other end of the alley! Bring the old duffer along! We thought something had happened, with all the cops prowling around!"

The Whisperer froze to the spot. He knew that even his gray-clad figure had been observed by the other man. He recalled now that the murdered man in Hoyle's office had been wearing a gray suit.

The other man was still looking down at the red carnation under the light. So some of his friends had been waiting for the dead man upstairs? They must have expected him to bring Hoyle along.

The Whisperer spoke. Under the circumstances, the other man may not have judged his high, whispering voice to be suspicious. It seemed merely cautious.

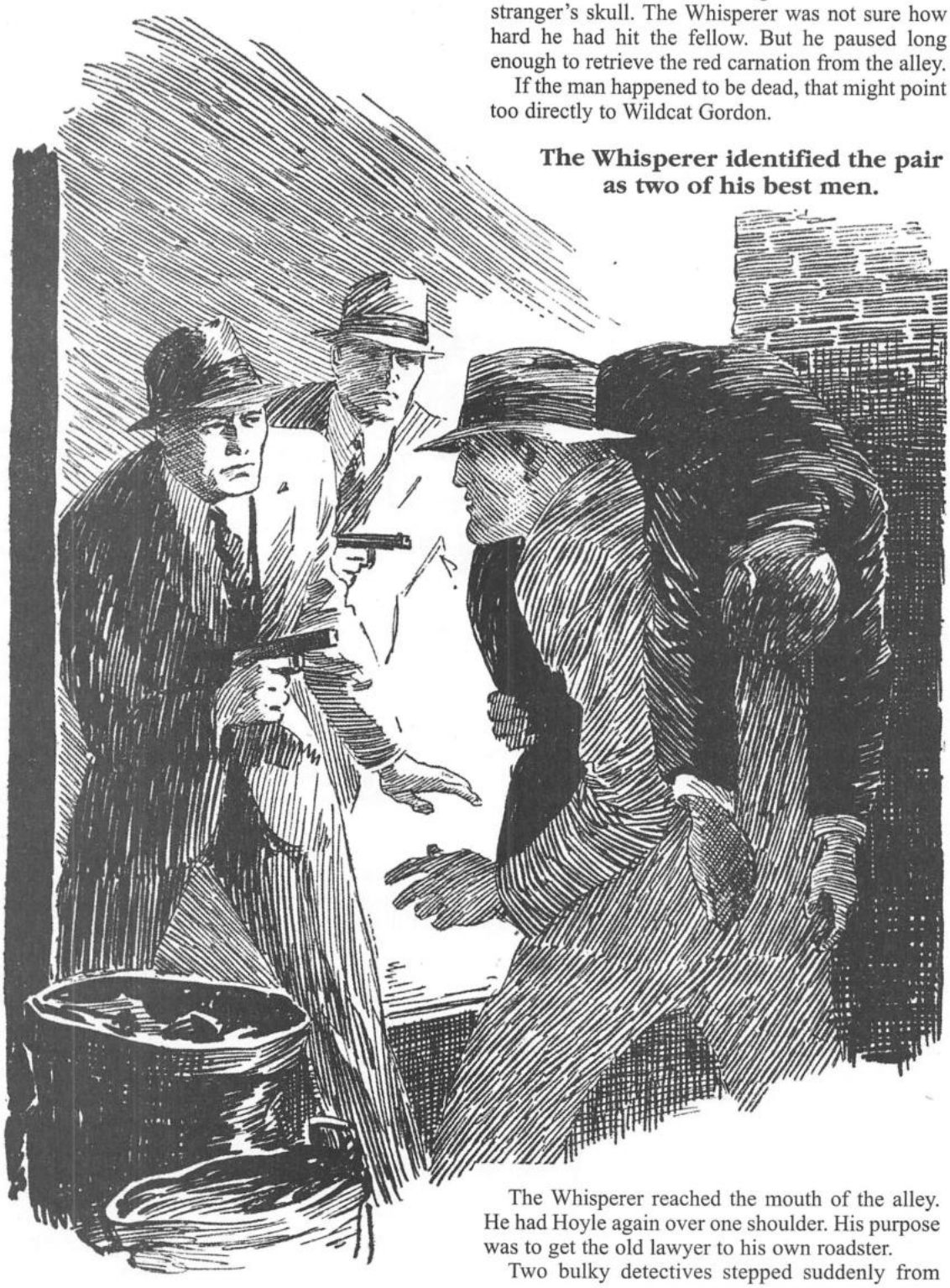
The Whisperer said, "Give me a hand with the old boy! He got the stuff off Jacklin!"

This last was a shot in the dark. It brought a chuckle from the other man. He stepped into view. He had a red rosebud in his buttonhole. He topped the inches of The Whisperer considerably.

"O.K., Carney, I'll take his feet," the man said, his hands reaching.

Hoyle's limp body struck the alley pavement. One of The Whisperer's hands went up, came down. The hard butt of a gun crashed on the stranger's skull. The Whisperer was not sure how hard he had hit the fellow. But he paused long enough to retrieve the red carnation from the alley.

If the man happened to be dead, that might point too directly to Wildcat Gordon.



The Whisperer identified the pair as two of his best men.

The Whisperer reached the mouth of the alley. He had Hoyle again over one shoulder. His purpose was to get the old lawyer to his own roadster.

Two bulky detectives stepped suddenly from

the shadow of the building nearby.

"Stick 'em up, you!" rapped one of the dicks. "I thought I heard somethin' goin' on back in there!"

BOTH bulky detectives had their revolvers trained upon The Whisperer. He identified the pair as two of his best men. They might not shoot before they asked questions, but they would shoot. And they were trained not to miss.

The Whisperer desired least of all to be trapped by his own men. The role he had taken was precarious. He knew that certain politicians would have expended any amount to pin a murder rap or two on The Whisperer.

"You've got me, boys!" came that hoarse, penetrating whisper.

Its eerie, sibilant note seemed to float on the air. If The Whisperer had slapped both detectives across their faces, he could not have created greater consternation.

"Howlin' hell!" yelled one of the dicks. "The Whisperer himself! Nail 'im, Mike! He's poison!"

Both detectives went into crouching positions. Their revolvers were steady. A high, whispering laugh swept like a wave of cold wind over their heads.

The Whisperer was only distinct enough for the two detectives to see his long, pointed chin, his long upper lip and his blur of grayish hair. Plainly the coppers feared death might strike at them from some unseen source.

Yet The Whisperer appeared to be tame enough. He deposited the limp body of Hoyle on the sidewalk carefully. Too carefully, if the detectives had noticed. But the two were edging closer, coming right on top of the stooping Whisperer, their guns ready to fill him with lead.

This approach was a mistake for the two dicks. The Whisperer did not arise from his crouching position. His body shot forward off his springy toes. He was diving at the knees of the nearest man. Two revolvers belched flame and lead.

CHAPTER VI
THE FIGHTING WILDCAT

THE WHISPERER felt the scorching sting of powder on the back of his neck. He was not so sure some of the lead had not bitten into his back. But his deceptive, terrible hands moved in a flashing grip.

Now, The Whisperer weighed probably fifty pounds less than any other man in the police department. Yet there was excellent reason for the name Wildcat having been given to him as Commissioner Gordon.

The two hundred pounds of bone and muscle that made up the detective Wildcat first hit hardly knew what happened to him. He had been sure that all he had to do was press the trigger and fill the gray Whisperer full of lead.

Now the big detective still was squeezing the trigger. But, at the same time, he was being pitched high into the air by the terrible hands with painful nerve holds on his ankles. He went crashing clear over the body of Phineas T. Hoyle on the sidewalk.

This detective struck on his nose. The other copper had quit shooting to attempt driving a blow with his gun down on The Whisperer's skull. This was a laudable intention on his part. It would have been very good, but The Whisperer's skull was not there.

A hard head, like the butt end of a log, struck the detective in the stomach. In The Whisperer's right hand appeared a short, stubby weapon, a blackjack.

Fortunately for his two faithful detectives, it was well padded.

Ten seconds after they started shooting, the two coppers lay sleeping on the sidewalk. The Whisperer caught up the body of Hoyle. As he moved, he could see several persons hastily removing themselves from the vicinity.

Pedestrians in the scurrilous neighborhood were not of good enough character to want to be summoned as witnesses. The removal of a couple of coppers, even if it had been permanent, probably would have had their full approval.

THE WHISPERER believed himself unobserved as he got Phineas T. Hoyle into the seat of his own police roadster. Then if anyone had been watching, they would have been amazed to hear the siren of the police commissioner's car clearing the way as The Whisperer drove at high speed for perhaps twenty blocks.

The Whisperer was aware pursuit would be swift. The two detectives would recover quickly. They would undoubtedly inform their fellows how The Whisperer had appeared carrying a dead man, knocked them out, then stolen the car of the police commissioner himself.

The Whisperer chuckled. It was an odd, ghostly chuckle. That and the whispering voice were caused by the strange dental plates that changed the contour of Wildcat Gordon's face. Old Quick Trigger had made those plates.

There had been some mistake on the part of the old man. With the dental plates in place, Wildcat Gordon had found it possible to speak only in that hoarse, eerie whisper. Quick Trigger would have altered it, but the whisper itself quickly came to be known as a mystery to be deeply feared and respected.

The Whisperer piloted the police roadster toward one of the river waterfronts. He could hear sirens going in several directions. One squad car was not far behind. It was coming into the next block.

The Whisperer halted the commissioner's roadster.

He shifted Hoyle's body to the sidewalk. Heading the little car at an angle across the street, he pulled on the hand throttle and put the roadster into gear.

There was a resounding crash of metal and glass. The police commissioner's car was shattered. A lamp post snapped off and toppled through its roof. Fire shot up and the roadster started to burn.

By this time, The Whisperer was crossing a vacant lot. A small, plain roadster was parked at the edge of this lot. This car bore no insignia of the police department. It was one of many such automobiles The Whisperer kept parked at various spots.

Loading the still limp body of Phineas T. Hoyle into this other roadster, The Whisperer reached the warehouse district some ten minutes later. He carried Hoyle into the lower part of one of the warehouse loft buildings.

LESS than ten minutes after Commissioner Gordon's car had been found wrecked and burning, Mayor Van Royston was shouting into a telephone. The other end of the connection was in the apartment rooms of Commissioner Wildcat Gordon in the penthouse of Old Quick Trigger.

Wildcat Gordon himself had replied to the mayor's frenzied call.

"It's The Whisperer again!" Mayor Van Royston shouted. "Now we know it was The Whisperer who killed Lannis Jacklin! And he just murdered another man, beat him all up in the office of that lawyer named Hoyle! Deputy Bolton has solved it all! You should get right down here! The Whisperer nearly killed two of your men!"

Wildcat Gordon grinned faintly. He was again his natty self, red necktie, army hat and fresh carnation.

"I was about to call it a day, a very poor day," he said to the mayor. "So Deputy Bolton has solved it? Well, that's good, Mayor! That must mean he knows The Whisperer himself."

"That's right!" snapped Mayor Van Royston. "It's that Phineas T. Hoyle, no other! You see, Henry Bolton's got brains! He figured it all out! This Hoyle was just posing as an old man! Why, the boys tell me you saw yourself how he had beaten out the brains of a giant armed with a gun! And Deputy Bolton says it proves, too, this Hoyle is the head of the red rosebud gang!"

Old Quick Trigger had come into Wildcat's room and was standing at his shoulder.

"Old man Hoyle will live, but it may be days before he can talk," he said in a low voice to Wildcat.

Wildcat said to Mayor Van Royston, "Congratulate Henry Bolton for me, Mayor. Sorry, I'm about to grab off some sleep. Tell Henry it might be a good idea to go out and get this fellow Hoyle and we'll see how he shows up."

"That's just what Henry Bolton's doing—rounding up this man Hoyle!" stated the mayor. "Now you'll issue the order for Martin Mudge to be released at once! That one arrest has made monkeys out of the whole department!"

"It wouldn't be much of a job for some of the department," murmured Wildcat. "Sorry, Mayor, but I'm about to have a cup of Java and roll in. See you in the morning."

The receiver sputtered as Wildcat replaced it. Quick Trigger said, "Somehow, Wildcat, you don't seem to do so good with his honor. Someday, my boy, you'll go too far."

A doll-like, brown-eyed girl, with a dancing little devil in each eye, came and stood in the doorway. She was Tiny Traeger, and though Wildcat was but five feet five, Tiny came just to his shoulder.

"Don't you ever expect to let a woman get any sleep?" said Tiny, in a weary tone. "Here it is three o'clock in the morning and—"

"So, you've hired a woman at last," interrupted Wildcat, with a broad grin. "Then why aren't you asleep?"

Tiny Traeger tossed her head scornfully. The hard-bitten Wildcat Gordon never had regarded her as anything other than a child. Tiny was twenty, but Wildcat still remembered the day when he had spanked her for lying to him.

Wildcat Gordon would have been amazed to know that Tiny Traeger had become a woman. A child-woman who would never be in love with any other person but Wildcat Gordon himself. In some respects, Tiny regarded Wildcat as one of the dumbest men she had ever known.

OVER a cup of coffee, Quick Trigger said, "I wouldn't be sure, Wildcat, but I'll bet that part of a map old Hoyle had is highly important to that rosebud gang. And the other half of it has been taken from under that fake mole on Lannis Jacklin's face. But where are you going to look for it?"

Wildcat Gordon suddenly set his cup of steaming coffee down.

"Hellamighty!" he exclaimed. "I might have thought of that! You know, Quick Trigger, when we put Martin Mudge back and didn't find anything on him, he had an earache!"

Quick Trigger rubbed one hand over his shiny bald head.

"I guess I'm not so quick on the pickup any more, Wildcat. So Martin Mudge had an earache? So I suppose you're sorry you locked him up?"

"So sorry," said Wildcat, mysteriously, "that his earache is getting him out of jail a few hours ahead of time!"

"Don't pay any attention to him, grandpa," said Tiny. "He's still crazy!"

Wildcat's grin was interrupted by the buzzing of

the bell at the penthouse entrance. Quick Trigger went out and came back.

"That damned Henry Bolton and Mayor Van Royston himself!" he announced.

CHAPTER VII
THE FIGHTING JUDGE

DEPUTY HENRY BOLTON had a self-satisfied smirk on his tight, round mouth. He strode into Wildcat Gordon's rooms with the air of a man who has already conquered the world. For had he not completely solved the mystery of the Lannis Jacklin murder?

Mayor Van Royston walked beside Henry Bolton. For once, his honor was minus his tall silk hat and reception clothes. This was three o'clock in the morning. Mayor Van Royston wore striped pants, in keeping with the hour, if that is what is worn at three o'clock in the morning.

Wildcat had uttered some quick instructions to old Quick Trigger before he went in to face his visitors. The old retired deputy had been left in the Traeger kitchen with Tiny and what was left of the morning coffee.

"Commissioner Gordon," began Mayor Van Royston in his most formal tone, "I will not even apologize for the hour, as I feel it is incumbent upon our police commissioner to give every possible assistance to the man who has gotten at the bottom of this Whisperer's murderous career."

A tight, pleased smile ornamented the face of Henry Bolton. Wildcat's colorless Texas eyes coolly surveyed his deputy from under the jaunty brim of his army hat.

"You have, no doubt, sent out a general alarm for Phineas T. Hoyle, Bolton?" remarked Wildcat.

"Took the liberty to call in all the men on leave, Commissioner, and started a roundup that no man can escape," said Henry Bolton, boastfully. "We'll have this Whisperer before daylight!"

Henry Bolton rubbed a forefinger along his beak of a nose. He looked as nearly as he could like an eagle about to pounce. His effort to appear dignified was much handicapped by the smallness of his mouth and the lowness of his forehead.

Wildcat poked some tobacco into his stubby pipe and applied a match. The resulting aroma was anything but pleasant to his visitors.

"If you get The Whisperer, it will be the making of you, Henry," observed Wildcat, mildly. "Phineas T. Hoyle seems to have slipped from our fingers. Probably he had a considerable start before we found the murdered man in his office."

"Yes!" snapped Mayor Van Royston. "And you were right on the job, Commissioner! But you seem to have left without your own car before The Whisperer appeared! And The Whisperer was carrying the body of still another man!"

Wildcat smiled faintly. He said that he had made a round of the block. When he returned, his roadster and his men were gone.

"All that doesn't matter!" stated Mayor Van Royston. "But I've come to tell you that I have called Judge Kyley and arranged for him to come down to the night court and admit Martin Mudge to bail! That mistake probably will cost you your job, Gordon! It was rank foolishness to lock Mudge up in the first place!"

WILDCAT GORDON caused both the mayor and Henry Bolton to eye him suspiciously. For Wildcat suddenly agreed that Mayor Van Royston had done exactly the right thing.

"We all make mistakes," admitted Wildcat, humbly. "If Judge Kyley has arrived at night court, I'll call him at once and request that he fix only a nominal bail, or permit Mudge to go on his own recognizance."

Henry Bolton's round mouth opened and stayed that way. Mayor Van Royston stroked his ingrown chin and watched Wildcat take up the telephone.

Neither man had ever seen Wildcat Gordon so thoroughly agreeable.

They heard a reply over the phone from the night court. The murmuring voice of Judge Patrick Kyley came on.

Wildcat said, "Sorry you've been disturbed, Judge Kyley, but it seems there is not evidence enough against Martin Mudge to justify holding him. My office will be satisfied with his release on only nominal bail, or perhaps his own recognizance."

Not even Wildcat expected what his surprising words to Judge Kyley evoked. Judge Patrick Kyley never was a mild man. At times, he shouted, even into telephones. He was shouting now. His voice was so edged and hard that it cut past Wildcat's ear into the room.

The words were plainly audible to Mayor Van Royston and Henry Bolton.

"Nominal bail? Nominal bail?" and Judge Kyley's voice grated like steel on granite. "Have him brought over, Commissioner Gordon! I fix the bail in this court! Mudge will put up one hundred thousand dollars cash, or he'll stay in a cell!"

Wildcat rubbed his ear under the impact of the judge's voice. His own surprise was as great as that of the others. But Judge Kyley rapped more words into the phone.

"And I've just assessed myself a fine of one hundred dollars for assault and battery, and it's cheap at the price!"

The telephone snapped abruptly. Wildcat Gordon replaced the instrument. He stared at it reflectively.

"I heard it!" roared Mayor Van Royston. "So you

had something up your sleeve, Gordon? Well, you'll not get away with it! I will see that Martin Mudge is released without any crazy amount of bail like that!"

Wildcat did not appear to be listening. He was trying to adjust himself to the situation. Something had happened to Judge Patrick Kyley. Something that directly concerned Martin Mudge and the mystery of Lannis Jacklin, ex-convict.

"I must change clothes," stated Wildcat, making a play for time to think. "I still agree with you, Mayor, that Martin Mudge should be released. I'll be ready in a few minutes to go to Judge Kyley's court with you."

WILDCAT GORDON'S blue suit was considerably rumpled, so his announcement that he would change his clothes was excusable. Wildcat was doing some fast thinking. He would have given considerable to know what had rubbed Judge Kyley the wrong way.

Now, at about the time Mayor Van Royston and Henry Bolton arrived at Wildcat's rooms, Judge Patrick Kyley had come into the night court. The stocky, florid-faced judge immediately relieved the police magistrate on the bench.

The usual crowd of curious filled the hard benches of the night court. Though far past middle age, Judge Kyley had bright, cold blue eyes. His gray hair was bushy and stood up stiffly.

Though his eyes were uncompromising, Judge Kyley nearly always wore a quiet smile. This smile remained as the sleek Toby Carron appeared before him. The youthful partner of Attorney Martin Mudge came immediately to the point. He shifted about on his small feet as he talked.

"Police Commissioner Gordon has made a grave mistake, Judge Kyley," stated Toby Carron. "My partner, Martin Mudge, has no more business being in jail tonight than you or myself."

"Humph!" grunted Judge Kyley. "Please confine the idea to yourself, Mr. Carron. Mr. Mudge is held on suspicion of murder. It would give me the greatest pleasure, Mr. Carron, to know that you were keeping him company!"

The judge's gavel checked a ripple through the room.

"I regret that many others of the Martin Mudge brand are not in jail tonight, Mr. Carron," went on Judge Kyley. "Suspicion of murder can indicate only the highest bail bond."

Toby Carron was thoughtfully chewing a thumbnail. His dapper dress gave him an air of confidence. Disregarding the judge's sharp remarks, Carron stepped closer to the high bench. He spoke carefully, making his voice carry to the judge alone. The words did not even reach the nearby bailiff.

"I think I understand, Judge Kyley," said Toby Carron. "I know that my partner has never been a supporter of your party, but possibly that—well, it could be changed."

Toby Carron leaned confidentially across the bench. His voice dropped to little more than a whisper.

"Judge, you will be up for reelection next Fall. Now possibly the sum of ten thousand dollars, spent judiciously, would be an advantage. You see, I know how Martin would feel and—"

Judge Kyley's stocky body reared up from the big leather chair. Those in the courtroom had not heard the suggestion of Toby Carron. Judge Kyley enlightened no one as to what the words had been.

"This court is hereby adjourned!" he thundered. "Let everyone in this room know that he is looking at Patrick Kyley, a plain citizen!"

The judge's big chair went over. Judge Kyley came directly over his bench. Toby Carron started back, but he was not quick enough. The judge had swung one fist from the waist.

Toby Carron was thirty years the junior of Judge Kyley. He was quick on his feet.

But the first blow caught him with a raking impact on his jaw. As Carron staggered and attempted to defend himself, Judge Kyley's fists played fast one, two, three across the lawyer's handsome features.

Toby Carron was slammed back across the table used by the counsel. He managed to get back to his feet. By this time, the lawyer was thoroughly mad. He swung viciously at Judge Kyley's head. Two blows landed, and the judge's nose started bleeding.

Judge Kyley puffed a little and his face grew redder. But he managed to time as neat an uppercut as was ever delivered in a ring. His knuckles raked Carron's chin, glanced upward and ripped one of his eyebrows.

Then the judge set himself and let go with a roundhouse, right-hand swing. Toby Carron failed to evade it. He was lifted from his heels and deposited with his head against the jury box. Scarlet fluid flooded from Carron's nose. He shook his head dazedly, trying to clear his vision.

But both of Toby Carron's eyes were rapidly closing. He got slowly to his feet and went over and sat down in a chair.

"This will be the finish of Judge Kyley," he was promising darkly.

JUDGE KYLEY rubbed bruised knuckles through his bushy hair. He dabbed away the blood from his nose. Then he walked back and seated himself in the big leather chair, which had been restored by the bailiff.

Those in the courtroom had been shouting. Now they became breathless.

"This court now will resume its functions!" snapped Judge Kyley. "Everybody quiet! Patrick Kyley, on your plea of guilty to the charge of assault and battery, Judge Kyley hereby assesses a fine of one hundred dollars and costs! The bailiff will collect!"

Judge Kyley pulled a leather purse from his hip. Solemnly, he extracted some bills and handed them to the bailiff.

"Now," he said, calmly, "in the matter of the bail bond of Martin Mudge, held on suspicion of murder, the amount will be fixed at one hundred thousand dollars. The prisoner will be produced in court at once. And the bail required will be cash."

The night court audience was still holding its breath as Judge Kyley was summoned to take a telephone call. That was the call which came from Wildcat Gordon!

At the moment Judge Kyley took the call, the battered Toby Carron still sat at the counsel table. His blackening eyes were slitted with hate. He glanced over the crowd toward the rear of the courtroom.

Toby Carron's gaze picked up the eyes of one man. The man was a hunchback with a grayish-black beard covering his face. He had been seated in the rear bench.

The hunchback was the man who had given the name of John Smith when he had visited Lannis Jacklin. He had been trailed by Wildcat Gordon's detectives, but the hunchback had proved a slippery customer.

In fact, at this moment, two of Wildcat Gordon's best men fully believed they were covering the hunchback in a small roominghouse on the waterfront.

No man could have left that house, except by some subterranean exit.

That was exactly why John Smith, the hunchback, was sitting in the night court. There had been a subterranean exit to the house which he had entered.

Apparently John Smith knew he had been shadowed.

Some unspoken message passed from Toby Carron to John Smith in the back row. The hunchback arose quietly and slipped from the courtroom. Those nearest the odd-looking man noticed he wore a bright red rosebud on his coat lapel. They also saw a disfiguring brown mole on the hunchback's left cheek.

Toby Carron nursed his battered face as the court waited for the appearance of Attorney Martin Mudge.

CHAPTER VIII
THE MISSING MR. MUDGE

ABOUT the time the hunchback, John Smith, glided from the courtroom presided over by the irascible Judge Kyley, Wildcat Gordon was apparently changing his clothes. He had announced to Mayor Van Royston and Henry Bolton he would accompany them to the court as soon as he had freshened up a bit.

Wildcat's dressing room was to one side of the one he used as a combination library and living room. This dressing room was entered by a single door from the library. As Wildcat entered, Deputy Henry Bolton cast a suspicious glance after him.

The mayor and the deputy could see all of the interior of the small dressing room when the single door was opened. They saw a long mirror, a shower bath at one side and a plain row of racks upon which hung a variety of clothing.

Wildcat Gordon always dressed flamboyantly. Right up to the minute. Whether his suit was blue, brown or some other color, it was always a bright shade. Red carnations were kept fresh in a vase on a little table.

One item was apparent to Mayor Van Royston and Henry Bolton. The door from the library was the only visible entrance and exit to this dressing room. It was an inside space, without so much as a window for ventilation. All of the clothing was neatly arranged on the racks along the side.

Wildcat Gordon closed the door behind him. Immediately there came the splashing of the shower bath. The mayor and deputy glared at the door. In spite of the apparent need for haste, the imperturbable Wildcat intended having a morning shower.

But Wildcat Gordon was not in the shower bath. For perhaps one minute, he was on a telephone that had been concealed from the other room. The splashing water covered his conversation.

The phone conversation was brief. Wildcat was talking with his chief aide, no other than Detective Sergeant Thorsen. He issued quick instructions. Any other man in the department might have questioned the strange command.

But Sergeant Thorsen had been in the army. When his superior officer spoke, he obeyed. Come hell or high water, an order was an order.

Mayor Van Royston was pacing up and down in the room outside. He could hear the shower bath still running merrily. The humming of Wildcat's voice came to him. Or the mayor thought it was Wildcat's voice.

In fact, old Quick Trigger was seated close to the splashing shower bath. Quick Trigger was humming a tune. Otherwise, there was no other person in Wildcat Gordon's dressing room.

When he had concluded his conversation with Sergeant Thorsen, Wildcat had whistled softly. Quick Trigger had stepped from among the clothes racks lining the wall. Wildcat had stepped into the

spot from which Quick Trigger had emerged.

As Wildcat vanished, there was a slight hissing sound. It was like the movement of a great piston in a steel cylinder. And that was exactly what was making the noise. In a tubular elevator constructed to hold but one person, Wildcat was dropped from the penthouse to the lower floor of the warehouse.

Hardly more than a minute after he had walked into the dressing room, Wildcat stepped into a plain, small roadster. The little car shot away. It followed a street leading toward the police precinct station where Attorney Martin Mudge was confined.

AS Wildcat's car moved toward the precinct station, another car moved from that station. The wooden-faced Sergeant Thorsen was at the wheel of the car. Beside him, handcuffed to Sergeant Thorsen's right wrist, was Attorney Martin Mudge.

The corpulent lawyer was shaking with rage. His small, black eyes glittered in his fat face.

"Your smart police commissioner will pay plenty for this outrage!" promised Martin Mudge. "Riding me through the streets like a common criminal. Where are you taking me?"

"Court!" snapped Sergeant Thorsen.

Thereafter, for perhaps two minutes, Martin Mudge invoked all of his talent in abuse. The square, wooden face of Sergeant Thorsen underwent no change. He was driving fast.

Thorsen shot the police car into a narrow back street. This was in the direction of Judge Kyley's court. At this hour, now nearly four o'clock in the morning, there was no other traffic.

Martin Mudge continued shouting reviling words. Thorsen looked straight ahead. The police car was in the middle of a vacant block. Around the next corner came another car. It was a small roadster.

Apparently the driver of this roadster was drunk. The little car followed a zigzagging course, taking up about all of the street. It was bearing down upon the police car, head-on.

"Look out!" yelled Martin Mudge. "Dammit! You'll get me killed, ironed up like this!"

Was there a slight grin on Thorsen's square face?

Thorsen twisted the police car wheel sharply. The auto swerved from the street to the sidewalk, just missing the madly driven roadster.

A fire hydrant broke off as one fender of the police car crumpled. A column of water shot up. The police auto jammed into a billboard and sent it crashing over.

Sergeant Thorsen sagged forward, his head smashing against the windshield. Martin Mudge was thrown from the seat. His fat body jammed in the car doorway as he attempted to pull himself free. His left wrist was attached to the apparently unconscious Thorsen. Impact against the rearview mirror had cut Mudge's forehead.

"By Heaven!" groaned Martin Mudge. "They'll pay plenty for this!"

Then Mudge saw the driver of the offending roadster had brought his car to a sudden stop. Mudge made a desperate effort to get his bulky body free and pull Sergeant Thorsen from under the steering wheel.

A GRAY figure seemed to float across the street in the gray darkness of morning. There was some light from a street lamp. The blurred face of the gray figure showed. It had an oddly pointed chin, a long upper lip.

"The Whisperer!" breathed Martin Mudge with fear.

"Yes!" came the piercing, hissing voice that seemed to be in the air all around. "I am The Whisperer! What have you done with the brown mole, Martin Mudge?"

The Whisperer was close beside the wrecked police car.

"I don't know what you're talking about!" squawked Martin Mudge.

That eerie whisper said, "There is no time!"

The Whisperer's right hand rose and fell. There was a soft, thudding blow. Martin Mudge ceased speaking. His fat body sagged limply.

The Whisperer extended a quick hand across the lawyer. There was a brittle snapping of steel. The handcuff links snapped apart. One cuff remained fastened to Mudge's wrist. The other was still attached to that of Thorsen.

There was no doubt but that Thorsen was completely out. There was a slowly swelling bruise across his forehead.

"Anyway, he's hell on obeying orders!" chuckled The Whisperer. "But just to make sure!"

The padded blackjack rose and fell. The

Whisperer had socked Sergeant Thorsen carefully across the back of his hard skull. It would be some time before Thorsen would recover consciousness.

All of this, from the time Wildcat Gordon had stepped into his own dressing room, leaving Mayor Van Royston cooling his heels, had taken less than five minutes.

The Whisperer carried Mudge's heavy body to his small roadster. The lawyer was breathing heavily. He would be out for some time. Before the roadster moved, The Whisperer performed a very slight operation on Martin Mudge.

He had told Quick Trigger that Mudge was apparently suffering from an earache. Cotton was stuffed deeply into one of the lawyer's ears. When he had been searched at the police station, it was apparent that small wad of cotton had been overlooked.

The Whisperer now had it in his hand. Under the cotton, stuffed in the ear, was the hairy, brown mole that had come off the face of Lannis Jacklin. Martin Mudge had acted swiftly when he had been put under arrest.

Still attached to the fake skin of the brown mole was a folded square of thinnest paper. The Whisperer wasted no more than a glance at this. It was the other half of the crude, little map that had been taken from the hand of Phineas T. Hoyle.

The Whisperer's roadster glided away. Sergeant Thorsen was still recumbent over his steering wheel. Martin Mudge was a huge lump of senseless flesh beside The Whisperer.

Again came that ghostly, whispering chuckle. Martin Mudge was due in the courtroom of Judge Patrick Kyley, there to provide one hundred thousand dollars cash bail. Well, he would be delivered to the court; or, at least, this was The Whisperer's good intention.

One block from Judge Kyley's night court, the street was deserted, Or so it appeared to The Whisperer. Perhaps he would not have been so confident had he noticed a closed sedan that had kept well behind the roadster from the time it had left Sergeant Thorsen in the wrecked police car.

There were four indistinct figures in that sedan. The driver had a grayish-black beard and a brown mole on his left cheek. He was John Smith, the man with the hunched back. Those directing the driver were cautioning him to take it easy.

The Whisperer did not see this sedan as he parked the roadster close to a building not far from the night court. A glance along the street showed no person moving. The Whisperer placed Martin Mudge carefully on the sidewalk, propping him in a sitting position against a building.

By this time Sergeant Thorsen must have recovered. He would be giving a telephone alarm over the escape of his prisoner. The Whisperer gave his eerie chuckle as he pictured the rush there would be from the night court.

Then the court officers would discover Martin Mudge sitting close by outside, with one handcuff on his wrist. Judge Kyley probably would add another hundred-thousand-dollar bail for attempted escape.

Martin Mudge was showing some evidence of coming back to his senses. The Whisperer started back toward his roadster.

THEN heavy feet pounded around the nearest corner. One of Wildcat Gordon's uniformed patrolmen walked into view. He was striding along without a care in the world. Suddenly, the patrolman halted and swore.

He saw Martin Mudge sitting upright against the wall.

But he did not see The Whisperer. There was only a gray blur beyond Mudge's body. The patrolman's revolver whipped into his hand. He barked out a command.

The order was out to get The Whisperer. Every man on the force knew his reputation as a quick killer. The patrolman was a youngster, a rookie. The air around him seemed filled with a penetrating, whispering voice.

"Remain quiet! Don't shoot! I can kill you before you pull that trigger! Drop your gun, turn around and walk the other way, if you want to live!"

Perhaps the patrolman had the nerve to shoot. But now The Whisperer had vanished altogether. The copper was looking only at the body of Martin Mudge. Mudge was breathing, moving as if he were about to recover.

There was another sibilant hissing. But this was not a voice. It was like compressed air being slowly released. The patrolman's revolver fell from his hand. There was a bloody streak across his knuckles.

Then the patrolman, wisely, turned around and walked the other way. He vanished around the corner.

As the copper's gun hit the sidewalk, The Whisperer was moving with amazing speed. He whipped into his roadster and the little car shot away from the scene.

The Whisperer made a note to see that the rookie patrolman got some sort of promotion. Anyway, the copper had tried. But it had been a bullet from a new type of silenced automatic that had torn the revolver from his grasp. A weapon that made only a sound like The Whisperer's own voice.

Neither the patrolman nor The Whisperer saw the shadowy figures of four men gliding along the buildings toward Martin Mudge, as the lawyer was

left alone. These men had come from the sedan, which had been swiftly parked in a nearby alley.

CHAPTER IX
MAP WITHOUT A KEY

LESS than twenty minutes from the time he had stepped into his small dressing room, Wildcat Gordon walked from his roadster into the waterfront warehouse of Quick Trigger. He approached what appeared to be a solid concrete column. This column opened and Wildcat was in his tubular elevator.

The Whisperer had vanished. As Wildcat emerged in the small dressing room, old Quick Trigger quit humming and fussing around. From outside came the voice of Mayor Van Royston. It sounded much as if his honor was swearing.

"How much longer are you going to take, Gordon?" called out the mayor. "They'll have Martin Mudge over to court before we get there, and I want to have a word with Judge Kyley."

Wildcat closed one eye in a slow wink at Quick Trigger. The old ex-deputy walked in among the hanging suits of clothes. There was the slight hissing of the concealed elevator.

Wildcat opened his library door and walked in upon Mayor Van Royston and the impatient Henry Bolton. He was wearing a gaudy brown suit, with a new red necktie, a fresh carnation, and his army hat cocked over his eye,

"Well, you took your time!" snapped the mayor. "Nearly twenty minutes! If you were in Martin Mudge's position, you wouldn't be taking a bath before spending a few minutes in court!"

"I guess you're right," agreed Wildcat with a grin. "But I don't happen to be in Martin Mudge's position."

He was thinking of Martin Mudge's fat body sitting on the sidewalk close to the night court. Any minute now the telephone from headquarters would be ringing. Surely Sergeant Thorsen had recovered from the blow on the head long before this time. Perhaps the sergeant, following orders given him by Wildcat, was purposely delaying his report of the escape.

Wildcat was satisfied that Mayor Van Royston was convinced he had not been out of that dressing room. Indeed, the mayor might have examined that dressing room thoroughly. The tubular elevator looked no different from any of the other racks of clothing.

"We'll get along down to court then," said Wildcat, suddenly becoming brisk. "Sorry, but I never like to hurry with dressing, Mayor."

Then the telephone rang. Wildcat picked up the instrument.

"Yes?" he said. "Thorsen? What happened?'

There was an excited mumbling over the wire. If Mayor Van Royston could have been looking into Wildcat's Texas eyes at this instant he would have seen that they mirrored sudden shock.

"I'll be right down!" Wildcat snapped into the phone.

He turned to Mayor Van Royston.

"There's considerable hell to pay, Mayor," he stated. "It seems some gang wrecked the police car in which Martin Mudge was being taken to night court.

"They knocked out Sergeant Thorsen and tore loose the handcuffs, but they did deliver Martin Mudge to Judge Kyley's court."

"What? What?" gasped Mayor Van Royston. "Grabbed Mudge, then delivered him to court? What kind of a story is that?"

"That's exactly what I'd like to know," said Wildcat, very truthfully. "For they delivered Martin Mudge outside the court dead—with a stiletto through his heart!"

The exclamations of Mayor Van Royston and Henry Bolton did not make any impression upon Wildcat. They would never know just what was passing through the puzzled commissioner's brain at this moment.

A wounded patrolman had reported that The Whisperer had struck again. Thorsen's report of Mudge's escape had not included any mention of The Whisperer. Thorsen had merely stated his car had been forced off the street and he had been knocked out.

The patrolman with the bloody fingers had declared he personally saw The Whisperer put a knife through the heart of Martin Mudge. That he had attempted to shoot The Whisperer, but that a bullet had torn the revolver from his hand.

The patrolman had added—and he could not be blamed for that—that afterward he had been knocked out and lay unconscious for several minutes. Then he had run to the night court and given the alarm.

But perhaps the patrolman was telling the truth about being knocked out.

WILDCAT GORDON, Mayor Van Royston and Henry Bolton arrived at Judge Kyley's night court while the fat body of the dead Martin Mudge was still sitting stiffly against the wall. Wildcat was sickeningly aware that Mudge was still in the position that he had placed him.

Then there had been no stiletto through his heart. But the hilt now protruded from the murdered lawyer's breast. Just as the same kind of weapon had been found in the heart of Lannis Jacklin.

But, though Mudge was sitting as The Whisperer had left him, now nearly all of his clothes had been stripped off. Even his shoes and

socks had been removed. And Wildcat Gordon was sure he knew exactly why that had been done.

Even if one of the squad men had not produced a crushed, red rosebud, Wildcat would have known the killers had been on the trail of the other half of a crude map concealed under two fake brown moles.

And by this time, Wildcat was aware of more than this. With the other half of the crude map in his possession, he was no nearer a solution of the mystery than before. There still was no key given as to where the lake might be located, about which several objects had been used as guides to something that had been concealed.

Wildcat had no time to think more of this now. Toby Carron, with both eyes blackened and swollen, was holding the center of the stage as Martin Mudge's body was being examined. Even the forceful Judge Patrick Kyley stood silently by.

"I tell you!" Toby Carron was shouting to Mayor Van Royston. "I tell you, either your police commissioner resigns or we have a fight that will kick you out of office with him! Wildcat Gordon gets out, you hear! And this Judge Kyley is through! Him a judge? Look at my face!"

Judge Kyley started forward at that, muttering, "I'll put a face on him that'll be something to look at!"

Wildcat Gordon touched Judge Kyley's arm.

"Let it ride, Patrick," he said, quietly. "You say he tried to offer a bribe to reduce Martin Mudge's bail? That gives me an idea!"

Mayor Van Royston did not seem to care for any of Wildcat's ideas at this moment. In fact, his honor was attempting to silence the raging Toby Carron.

"This city's got to be cleaned up, Carron!" said Mayor Van Royston. "There was a big mistake made when Gordon was appointed commissioner! It is shown your partner was killed by The Whisperer! Have patience, Carron; it will be The Whisperer that loses Gordon his job! Henry Bolton knows who The Whisperer is, and we'll have him before another twenty-four hours!"

Wildcat Gordon stood to one side. He made no comment as the patrolman with the wounded hand reported jointly to him and the mayor. The copper declared he had seen The Whisperer, and that he was a little, old man with gray hair and a pointed chin.

The patrolman further stated The Whisperer had been backed by a gang. He had seen at least half a dozen men rush away after his gun had been shot from his hand.

"When we get this Phineas T. Hoyle, Mayor," asserted Henry Bolton, "we'll break this case wide open!"

The tone of Henry Bolton also proved he was convinced that Wildcat Gordon also would be broken. As a matter of fact, Wildcat was as sure of it as Henry Bolton, providing they happened to discover that Phineas T. Hoyle now was unconscious in Wildcat's own rooms.

Suddenly the ring around the body of Martin Mudge was broken. A detective sergeant hurried up to Wildcat Gordon.

"Sorry, chief," he said, attempting to keep others from hearing, "but we've got another dead man a couple of blocks up the street. And we found one of them red rosebuds there, too. The fellow had a brown mole under his left eye."

Wildcat jerked his army hat low over one eye.

"You may take charge here, Henry!" he snapped at Deputy Bolton. "I hope you get The Whisperer. I've another little murder that seems to need a looking over!"

WILDCAT GORDON had to admit to himself he was becoming a trifle dizzy. All of this was getting very thick. Yet it was cleared up in his own mind slightly after he had viewed the body of the latest murder victim.

This fellow was without doubt a nobody. His clothing and lack of identification indicated he was a transient. There was an unsightly brown mole under his left eye. But examination showed this mole had grown there naturally.

There was no doubt in Wildcat's mind but that the mole had been the cause of the man's death. The victim's clothing had been searched. His shoes and socks had been removed.

Now Wildcat was sure the mysterious red rosebud gang must be playing for high stakes. Beginning with the murders of the watchmen in storage warehouses, there had been a bloody trail. The crude map, without even a key as to the location of the lake where it had been made, was without doubt the immediate object of the killings.

After viewing the last of the murder victims, Wildcat quietly faded from among his men. Dawn was just breaking as he ascended wearily to the penthouse and went to his rooms.

Quick Trigger came in and Wildcat sketched briefly what had happened. Quick Trigger might have earned his name by having a quick hand on a gun, but that did not mean he lost his head. The old man rubbed a hand thoughtfully over his bald pate and peered at Wildcat from under his bushy brows.

"Reckon we haven't been doin' so good, Wildcat," he said, slowly. "I wouldn't be surprised but what Mayor Van Royston will have the whole reform party backing him up before tonight."

Wildcat grinned wryly and said. "Sure, sure! And what do you make of the rest of this map, if anything?"

He put together the two scraps of paper, one of which had come from under the fake mole on Lannis Jacklin's face.

Taken together, there was a crudely penciled lake. On the one side were two stumps with a tree between them. On the other was what might have been a small ridge of rock.

The printed notation on both sides of the map read:

> LINE UP ROCK WITH TREE BETWEEN STUMPS. WALK SIXTY-ONE FEET TO COPPER PEG IN GROUND ACROSS LAKE AND PROCEED EXACTLY FORTY FEET FROM COPPER PEG TO SHALE ROCK RIDGE. MOVE MIDDLE STONE AND DIG DOWN TEN INCHES. FOLLOW INSTRUCTIONS.

Old Quick Trigger studied the thin paper map intently.

"Reckon you'd first have to find the lake," he said. "But when you do, Wildcat, you are going to know more about why Lannis Jacklin and these others were wearing red rosebuds."

"Exactly," stated Wildcat. "First find the lake. I take it that someone in this murder crowd knows the location of that lake, but they lacked the directions Lannis Jacklin and this man killed by Phineas T. Hoyle had under the brown moles. Where would you say an outsider might look for the final key to this thing?"

Quick Trigger squinted his mild eyes and said, "Likely it would be under another brown mole, Wildcat. I have an idea that some of this rosebud crowd have been waiting years for Lannis Jacklin to come out of the big house."

WILDCAT GORDON was making a rapid summing up of the tangled mystery of the murders. His mind went back to the Andrews will in Phineas T. Hoyle's office. An immense fortune had been bequeathed to Maralyn Andrews. Hoyle had been the family attorney.

Maralyn Andrews' father had lost his fortune and disappeared. Maralyn had never received any of the millions. What had happened? Who had caused Andrews to lose his fortune?

Wildcat turned to his original reason for having Lannis Jacklin hold "open house" before he died. It had not been altogether the matter of the warehouse murders and the red rosebuds.

For the infallible memory of old Quick Trigger had supplied some information. That was that years before he had been sent to State prison, this Lannis Jacklin had been known by another name.

And under that other name, Lannis Jacklin had been a lawyer. In fact, Lannis Jacklin had once been the partner of Phineas T. Hoyle, the down-and-out old attorney. And in those days the law firm had been prosperous.

Lannis Jacklin had been murdered at the police precinct station under circumstances that pointed strongly to Hoyle. Then Hoyle had undoubtedly killed another man wearing a red rosebud in his office. And Hoyle had been after the sections of the map under the brown mole.

Yet Hoyle had not gotten the half from Jacklin's face. Martin Mudge had stolen that. Now Martin Mudge was dead. And Phineas T. Hoyle was at this moment lying unconscious, near death, in this penthouse.

"Do you think Hoyle may recover enough to talk?" Wildcat asked of Quick Trigger.

The old ex-deputy shook his head. He said it was doubtful. Hoyle was suffering with a serious brain concussion. Quick Trigger was giving him what care he could. Even then, Tiny Traeger was acting as nurse, knowing little of the mystery.

Quick Trigger now advised humbly, "I reckon, Wildcat, you'll have to find Maralyn Andrews before someone finds out Phineas T. Hoyle is here. If they discover Hoyle, you won't be police commissioner long."

Wildcat agreed to that. At this moment, he was aware that Toby Carron, the smart criminal lawyer, would be using all of his influence with Mayor Van Royston to oust him from the police. Wildcat said, "I'll be gone some time, Quick Trigger. Finding Maralyn Andrews is next on the cards. There is but one way to get at the abduction angle and the connections of the red rosebud gang."

CHAPTER X
THE WHISPERER'S VISITOR

NOON came, the day following the murder of Attorney Martin Mudge. Newspaper extras were pounding at the police commissioner with flaring headlines. Demands were being made for an immediate breaking of the rosebud murder cases, the apprehension of The Whisperer and a general cleanup.

Or, under these headlines, it was stated a direct demand of Mayor Van Royston's own reform party would be made for the resignation of Police Commissioner Gordon.

Attorney Toby Carron was prominently mentioned in all of these stories. The dapper partner of the late Martin Mudge was stirring up trouble in several directions; in this, apparently, he was having the full sympathy of Mayor Van Royston and Deputy Commissioner Henry Bolton.

In the police commissioner's office there was only one man who sat stolidly by and kept his mouth shut. This was the wooden-faced Detective Sergeant Thorsen. With a blue bruise on his forehead, the sergeant occupied a desk in Wildcat Gordon's office.

He had told his story of the strange escape of Martin Mudge from the police car. But neither Mayor Van Royston nor Henry Bolton could

extract any explanation as to why he had started alone with Martin Mudge to the night court.

Henry Bolton had all of the reserve men called in. He was issuing frequent statements that it would be only a matter of hours until The Whisperer, the killer behind all of these rosebud murders, would be in custody.

As the afternoon grew late, the tense situation in the police commissioner's office was increased. Wildcat Gordon had not appeared at his office. Calls to his penthouse apartment elicited only the information the police commissioner was absent on business.

Newspaper reporters camped in the commissioner's office. They were awaiting the first tip that Deputy Henry Bolton had rounded up The Whisperer. That tip did not come.

LATE this same afternoon a modest-appearing man in a gray suit moved along a cluttered tenement street. There was nothing about his mild appearance to distinguish him from thousands of other average men.

This man wore gray shoes that matched his quiet clothes. A blur of grayish hair showed under a round-brimmed hat. The man's chin was long and pointed, and his upper lip overlapped the lower lip a little. The eyes might have been gray, or they might have been blue. They were almost without color.

More than one ambitious policeman rubbed clothes with this man. Several of the best detectives in the department no doubt saw him pass aimlessly along among the pushcarts of the tenement street.

But the man in gray was of the type that any copper would instantly classify as a harmless, inoffensive fellow, perhaps a modest clerk.

So The Whisperer was secure enough, walking in daylight. In fact, all the glimpses that had ever been obtained of The Whisperer in night hours would have been insufficient to have provided identification at any morning show-up.

For hours, The Whisperer had been slipping from one barroom in the tenement underworld district to another. While he was not known as the notorious Whisperer, this unassuming little man in the gray suit had become the friend and confidant of many who were listed in the police records.

The afternoon now was waning. The Whisperer had talked here and there in the right places. But he had received no hint of the whereabouts of the missing Maralyn Andrews. Yet such a "snatch" should have become known among certain denizens of this district.

The abduction was of a character that should have pointed to any one of several police characters. The rosebud gangsters should have been known. But The Whisperer had been balked at every turn.

Therefore, it had become clear enough that the abductors of the girl, the members of the rosebud gang, had not recently been prominent in the underworld.

This started The Whisperer thinking again of men who possibly had been forced to wait fifteen years for Lannis Jacklin to emerge from prison before they could get on the trail of some mysterious fortune.

The evening shadows slanted into the canyon of the tenement street. The Whisperer made his way slowly toward an old roominghouse of red brick. This place housed a bar in its basement. Its five narrow stories were filled with small rooms and narrow, dark stairways.

Possibly there was no permanent or transient resident of this unsavory habitation who could be classed as a good citizen. Nearly all were constantly outside the law.

As The Whisperer reached this scurrilous dwelling, he paused on the sidewalk, looking up at a dirty, third-story window. From his lips issued a sibilant, piercing sound. It was more of a whistle than a whisper, but it was penetrating.

The Whisperer made the sound several times, watching the third-story window. There was no movement, no sign that the signal had been heard.

"Now what," said The Whisperer to himself, "do you suppose has happened to Boru? If he hasn't had his meals, there'll be trouble!"

NOW, friends of Police Commissioner Wildcat Gordon would have been amazed to know that Boru was only a dog. A Scottish terrier, but The Whisperer had named him Brian Boru. And as The Whisperer, the police commissioner of the great city of steel and iron had come to this brothel to see that his dog was fed.

For The Whisperer at this time maintained a residence in the worst brothel in the underworld district. He had several such residences, and for his own purposes he moved frequently.

But Brian Boru had never before failed to appear at that whispering, whistling signal. The Whisperer was instantly on his guard. For Brian Boru was a tough and loyal dog.

The Whisperer used his own keys to enter the rooming section of the building. He moved with infinite caution.

It was unfortunate for The Whisperer that he had been unable to keep in touch, except by the newspapers, with the hue and cry being raised against himself as police commissioner. By the headlines, he knew that Attorney Toby Carron was employing every effort to discredit Wildcat Gordon.

But he did not know that Toby Carron also had joined actively with the police in an effort of his own to get The Whisperer.

The law business of Mudge & Carron had long been directed at the defense of criminals. The guilt or innocence of their clients was of little concern to this firm. Mudge & Carron had indeed found it more profitable to "beat the rap" for guilty clients.

They were of the brand of lawyers that more than any other element maintains crime in a high place. The brand that makes a fortune from blood money and keeps known murderers walking the streets of every great city.

In such a business, it was natural that Mudge & Carron should have had many strange clients. This afternoon, an hour or two before The Whisperer reached his roominghouse in the underworld, Toby Carron had a strange client in his office.

THIS client, or perhaps visitor, was a beautiful woman. She had a magnificently molded figure. Her dark eyes alternately flashed and smoldered as she looked at the dapper lawyer. Raven-black hair clustered around perfect ears marred only by earrings of ruby red that were too large.

Toby Carron knew the woman as Roma Tremont. She had used other names. Carron knew her as a woman handy with a rod. In the language of the criminal world, Roma Tremont was known as a gun moll.

"I'm listening, Toby," she said to Carron. "But it will have to sound good, and it will come high."

The dapper Toby Carron looked at her intently. His even teeth gnawed at his thumbnail.

"The people down in that neighborhood have heard the voice of The Whisperer," said Toby Carron. "I want the police to get him, but there are others who will make it worthwhile if they can talk with him first."

"The Whisperer?" smiled Roma Tremont. "I don't know. I've heard some things."

"It will be worth one grand for you to lead him into a trap," stated Toby Carron. "I have some clients who will take care of the rest of it. My clients believe The Whisperer would be interested in finding Maralyn Andrews. You can tell him you know where the girl has been taken. That ought to get him."

"Two grand," smiled Roma Tremont, "and lay it on the line, Toby. Now."

The dark eyes of Roma Tremont smoldered as she left Toby Carron's office. She had been given an address in one of the neighborhoods she knew best.

CHAPTER XI
THE FANGS OF BORU

THE WHISPERER entered the narrow stairway leading to his third-floor rooms. High voices could be heard from other apartments in the building. The reputation of this place was such that a scream or a shot would have aroused little curiosity.

A murder might have been committed in any of these rooms without another door being opened. As The Whisperer started up the second flight of stairs, a frowsy woman stuck her head from a doorway.

"It's you!" she snapped. "Well, you owe me ten! I've been feedin' him regularly!"

The Whisperer extracted a bill and thrust it into the frowsy woman's hand. The door snapped shut. The Whisperer went on up to the third flight of stairs.

Here there was but one small light bulb. Looking up, it could be seen that the first door at the head of the stairs was closed. But The Whisperer went up the steps with three bounds.

He had seen a small, black body lying on the top step of the stairs. A hairy, black body, with only the gleam of teeth showing where the lips were drawn back. It was the Scottish terrier, Brian Boru.

White foam had formed around the small dog's gleaming fangs. But the breath still wheezed in the dog's throat. His sides moved with an effort to breathe.

The Whisperer had whipped a flat automatic into one hand. On this was a strange cylinder, unlike any ordinary silencer. This was the gun of the hissing death. The Whisperer covered the door leading to his rooms.

Boru whined faintly. There was no sound or movement from the room from which the dog had apparently been ejected.

The Whisperer shoved the silenced gun back into his clothes. He caught up the small dog and ran back down the stairs. Two minutes later, he had Boru on a counter in the rear of a corner drugstore.

BRIAN BORU had been poisoned. The druggist said that in another five minutes he would have been dead. He was still a sick dog when The Whisperer again took him in his arms.

Boru's red tongue licked at The Whisperer's hand. He was whining as The Whisperer again reached the door of the third-floor rooms.

"Quiet, Boru!" commanded his master.

The whispering voice seemed to have a strange effect. The dog became quiet. His coal-black eyes regarded his master with keen intelligence. Though he was still sick, Boru drew back his upper lip, exposing his fangs.

Those same white fangs had many times been an effective aid to The Whisperer. Boru had uncanny intelligence. There were moments when his master had only to wink an eye to send him into vicious action.

As The Whisperer softly opened his door, he was keenly alert. He permitted the door to swing wide without exposing his body. One hand trained

his automatic on the inside of the room. The furnishings were such that the flashing on of an automatic electric globe showed all of the interior.

The room was empty. The Whisperer stepped into the doorway.

"Walk right on in with your dog," ordered a husky voice. "You can drop that rod, and don't think I won't shoot!"

The Whisperer did not attempt to turn or use his weapon. He walked into the room. For the voice had come from behind him. A gun had been pushed into his back.

Hiding in the darkness of the hallway, Roma Tremont had taken the first trick in her introduction to the much-feared Whisperer.

The Whisperer put down the dog. He turned slowly, lifting his hands. He saw the beautiful Roma Tremont with the smoldering, dark eyes, holding an automatic pistol aimed steadily.

The door closed with a movement of the woman's foot. She turned on a brilliant smile, and her red earrings flashed.

"I've come to you only with information you may want, but I have heard too much about you to take any chances," she stated. "If you don't want to know what I've come to tell, I will go. But you will keep your hands up."

The Whisperer's grin was unpleasant. But as the gun moll surveyed his apparently slight figure and his mild face, she shrugged her shoulders.

"You don't look like much at that!" she said, scornfully. "I think you've been overrated! But they tell me you've got dough, and that's what counts!"

The Whisperer let his Texas eyes rove over the lines of Roma's undeniably attractive figure. His whispering voice spoke.

"You're Roma Tremont," he said. "I've heard of you, but you weren't overrated. You're a swell looking dame. Yes, I've got some dough. What is it you want?"

She might be a gun moll, but Roma was still a woman. The look in The Whisperer's eyes was not unpleasing. Still, she kept the automatic in a handy position.

"For a grand I can tell you where Maralyn Andrews has been taken, if you're interested," she said, "I've been told you might want to find her."

THE WHISPERER could put on a good act when it came to women. As Wildcat Gordon, he was a man who appealed to the other sex. As The Whisperer, he was somewhat handicapped by his modest looks, but in two minutes Gordon had managed to convey to Roma Tremont that she had his firm admiration.

He was aware it was a toss-up whether he was being tricked or this seductive gun moll really was out for a thousand dollars. He judged she was of the type that would have sold out anyone. Perhaps she did know of the whereabouts of Maralyn Andrews.

The Whisperer made a quick decision. He had kept his hands lifted. At no time had Roma Tremont's weapon wavered.

He told her he would pay a thousand gladly to find Maralyn Andrews.

At the same time, The Whisperer had been watching the dog Boru from the corner of his eye. The Scottish terrier was recovering. He had twisted from his side; his hind feet were pulled into a crouch. Boru's bright eyes were fixed upon his master's face.

"I'll take the grand first, but don't forget I'm ready to blast you if you try any tricks," stated the woman. "Maralyn Andrews is being guarded by one old man. I can take you to her."

Roma Tremont had kept her smoldering eyes on The Whisperer. She would have fared better if she had watched the dog she had attempted to poison.

The Whisperer said, "The money is in my inside coat pocket. You can get it. Then I'll go with you to the girl." Roma Tremont took a step forward. She was doing very well. Here would be another grand besides the payment from Toby Carron. One slender, white hand reached toward The Whisperer's coat pocket.

The woman did not see The Whisperer slowly close one eye. He was looking at the crouching dog. There was a sudden flash of furry-black across the floor. It was accompanied by a vicious snarl.

Boru's white fangs clamped upon one curving, silken ankle. At the same instant, The Whisperer dropped. The woman screamed. Her automatic pistol exploded. The slug whined off the wall. Roma Tremont writhed to the floor, screaming again with the pain of Boru's teeth sunk into tender flesh.

The Whisperer had the gun moll's wrists firmly held when he gave Boru the order to let go. The dog obeyed reluctantly. Roma Tremont was pushed into a chair. Her hands were secured. The Whisperer gave first aid to the bleeding ankle.

Roma Tremont moaned as antiseptic liquid fire seared the torn flesh. She used the kind of language that only a gun moll could have understood. The Whisperer only grinned.

His hissing voice said, "Too bad Boru hasn't the rabies, seeing you tried to poison him. Now we'll go to Maralyn Andrews. Perhaps this grand will help. I try to keep my word."

The enraged Roma Tremont was amazed. The Whisperer put a roll of bills in her hand. At that, her red lips pouted temptingly.

"You're smart, and you're not so bad," she said.

DARKNESS had now folded in the grimy little underworld district. As The Whisperer left his rooms, he locked the door carefully. The terrier, Boru, lay in one corner of the room with what looked like a cheerful grin across his white fangs.

Roma Tremont accompanied The Whisperer quietly. A taxicab was summoned. The woman gave an address on the waterfront.

"We'll have to walk a block along the wharf," she said. "The girl is being held on a houseboat. I'll point it out, but I can't go with you. They would bump me off in a minute."

The Whisperer said nothing. He had expected something like that. Perhaps Roma Tremont did not know where Maralyn Andrews was being held. This whole thing might be a trap. And if it was, The Whisperer was walking directly into it, with his eyes wide open.

It had been his experience that when crooks wanted you to come to them, it was a good idea to meet their play. At the last minute, he intended to use Roma Tremont for his own purpose. For the present, he made every pretense of believing the woman was out to pick off an easy thousand dollars.

When the taxicab had moved away from the unsavory building where The Whisperer resided, Roma Tremont had seen the dog Boru locked in the room. She would have been surprised to know that Boru had waited only until his master's footsteps had died away.

Then Boru had flashed over to the door. The dog nosed for a few seconds at the bottom panel. A part of this panel opened and the black terrier crept cautiously down the stairs.

Perhaps any other dog would have made a direct dash for the taxicab in which his master was riding away. Boru crouched close to the building until the cab started moving. Then he became a weaving, black streak among the feet of pedestrians.

When the taxicab was stopped near a black and silent wharf, The Whisperer waited until the driver had opened the door.

"You'll go along the wharf to the end," said Roma Tremont. "The houseboat is painted yellow and black. You can't miss it. Now you'll let me go back?"

The taxicab driver was amazed to hear a sibilant whispering that seemed to come from the air all around him.

"This gun makes no noise! You will get out and walk just ahead of me! If everything is not as you say, your friends won't have the chance to bump you off! Understand?"

"But I won't—"

The Whisperer's hard hand clamped over the woman's lovely mouth. The words he hissed into her ear sent her ahead of him from the taxicab.

The confident gun moll was trembling now, for the scared taxicab driver had not even waited for his pay. He had sprung into his seat and driven away.

AT no previous time in his career had The Whisperer taken a longer gamble with fate. He had finally judged that he was being drawn directly into a trap. Moreover, if he was guessing correctly, the reason for this could be but one—

As The Whisperer, he was believed to have the two parts of the strange treasure map. He had considered this grimly. He did not have this map upon him. That had been left with Quick Trigger.

He was sure that those desiring his capture had not in any manner connected him with the police, least of all with the police commissioner himself.

Therefore, The Whisperer reasoned that his life was safe enough for the present, no matter what might happen. Roma Tremont's fear, he began to believe, was not because of someone she might be double-crossing, but a fear of The Whisperer himself.

The woman limped along the dark wharf with the silenced gun pressed into her curving back. The Whisperer's keen eyes studied the dark hulks of watercraft nearby. No light appeared on any of these.

Perhaps a hundred yards from where they had left the taxicab, the old wharf came abruptly to an end. The Whisperer could hear the dull lapping of the tidewater in the river. He was aware that this district was frequented by some of the worst of the city's killers.

Because of the abandonment of old warehouses and docks, the section was not well policed. There was no reason for as much as a watchman on the shaky pier.

The Whisperer saw dim lights at the end of the wharf. He could make out the outlines of a houseboat. There was light enough to see it was painted black and yellow. He speculated on whether he would really be permitted to reach that houseboat before something happened.

CHAPTER XII
TRAP OF THE TIDE

THE WHISPERER was still alert, but slightly confused, when they reached the end of the wharf without anything happening. The dark shadows of the wharf buildings were concealing, sinister enough to have afforded opportunity for attack. But none came.

Roma Tremont was still shaking. Perhaps it was The Whisperer's gun touching her back, or it could have been, as she said, the fear of those she might be double-crossing. And for the minute it did seem as if it might be the latter.

"I told you—now will you let me go and—"

The gun moll was whispering hoarsely. She

The Whisperer halted Roma Tremont, a ruthless hand pinching her arm for silence.

pointed ahead. A lighted square of window showed. Inside of one of the small cabin rooms of the black and yellow houseboat sat an old man. The light was not good, but it could be seen the man was gray-haired.

Beside this old man, lying on a small iron cot, was the bound figure of a girl. The Whisperer could just pick out the white blur of her face. He halted Roma Tremont, a ruthless hand pinching her arm for silence.

From somewhere on the dark wharf, close by, sounded the soft padding of feet. They moved; then they halted. They moved again. The Whisperer flicked a pencil flashlight from a pocket. Carefully concealing this from the old man in the houseboat, he shot the ray along the old wharf,

He snapped the light off almost instantly. The beam had picked up two closeset, luminous eyes. These were where the soft padding of feet had been heard.

From The Whisperer's lips came a peculiar whispering whistle.

"You can wait here," he whispered into Roma Tremont's ear. "I'll go aboard and—"

There came a whistling sound as of an object flying swiftly through the air. The missile struck The Whisperer's head with an impact that sent his round brimmed hat whirling over the end of the wharf.

ROMA TREMONT no doubt expected to feel a leaden slug blasting into her curving back. For, with the crunch of the thrown missile on the bone of The Whisperer's skull, the woman cried out and jumped from the wharf.

Her body splashed in the tide, and she cried out again. The Whisperer, as she apparently had expected him to do, had not fired his silenced pistol. Not that he would have hesitated to have killed the gun moll, if it had been justified; but the Wildcat Gordon inside The Whisperer had a secret admiration for this nervy temptress with her glittering, red earrings.

The Whisperer's silenced weapon hit the edge of the wharf and fell into the water. The Whisperer felt himself turning slowly, finding no balance for his feet. As his brain went numb, he was aware that strong arms had prevented him from falling and that he was being lifted aboard the houseboat.

The numbness left his brain slowly. He was sitting firmly, bound in a hard chair. His aching eyes first saw the iron cot on which a bound girl had been lying. This cot now was empty. The old man he had seen had vanished.

But there were five other men in the small cabin of the houseboat. Five men with masks, apparently hastily contrived out of sacks, pulled over their heads. The Whisperer could hear voices murmuring faintly in some other cabin of the houseboat.

The five men apparently had been talking, but they became silent as they saw The Whisperer's eyes open. All five of the men were seated. One was holding an open bottle of brandy. The bite of the liquor was on The Whisperer's tongue.

If there were red rosebuds in the buttonholes of any of the five men, the sacks with eye holes concealed them. But when the man with the brandy bottle moved, a high, misshapen hump was visible on his right shoulder.

This could be none other than the mysterious man who had called himself John Smith, was The Whisperer's instant conclusion. The man with the brown mole under his left eye. And even now, The Whisperer was sure here was the rest of the secret of the mysterious treasure map.

Perhaps the dead Lannis Jacklin, ex-convict, had been responsible for all of this. He might have been the leader of a gang before he went to the big house. Like all crooks, the members of this gang did not trust each other.

So, while he was in State prison, Lannis Jacklin might have devised this method of retaining the secret of plunder that had been hidden before he was sent away.

By retaining one part of a map, entrusting another part with a second man, and perhaps the location of the unnamed lake with a third man, Lannis Jacklin could have made certain he would still hold this gang and regain his share of their loot when he came from prison.

All of this was conjecture on the part of The Whisperer. But this was beginning to seem the only logical solution to the desperate, murderous activities of the wearers of the rosebuds.

Now The Whisperer had his own methods. Before any of the five masked men could speak, his eerie, penetrating whisper filled the houseboat cabin.

"You have been clever," he said. "Perhaps you think you had me tricked? Don't fool yourselves. I knew where I was coming, and I wanted to find you! I have been only waiting to make a deal!"

THE suddenness of the startling whisper, and the intention of the words, brought two of the five men to their feet. One was the man with the hunched back, John Smith. The other had less bulk than his companions, but it was instantly apparent he was the leader.

"So, you've been waiting to make a deal?" came a voice, muffled by the masking sack. "The great Whisperer wants to make a deal?"

"That's right," said The Whisperer. "You know what I have. The map you want. So it's fifty-fifty, half to me and half to the rest of you, or you'll never see any part of that map!"

As he spoke, The Whisperer was aware that his clothing had been thoroughly searched. And in this venture, he was wearing a plain gray suit, with none of the devices that would have exposed him.

None there even suspected that his strong, protruding teeth were part of artificial dental plates. He was lucky, indeed, this had not been removed.

"Fifty-fifty?" said the muffled voice of the leader. "You're crazy! We get that map, and we get it tonight, or in a very short time you will be minus all of your toenails!

"After that, if you still haven't talked, you will be found in an alley, still alive, and the police will be notified! Then, some time before they burn the great Whisperer for murder, we'll find a way to make you squeal!"

The Whisperer's ghostly, scornful laughter filled the cabin. The five masked men could not know how effective that ridiculous threat had been. There could have been no tougher spot for The Whisperer than to have been found by his own police. But his jeering hisses did not indicate this.

The hunchback suddenly proposed another plan, but first he asked a question.

"Suppose we consent to a split and you give us the map, how could you be assured we wouldn't finish you off as soon as we have what we are looking for?"

"Because," stated The Whisperer, "only one man will ever go with me after that treasure. I give my word he will be permitted to return with half. And if that man tries anything, he will not come back!"

Was it something like a chuckle that came from the throat of the hunchback?

"Smart! Smart!" he said. "But I've thought up another one! Boys, the tide has turned! In another hour it will be well up over the piling under the wharf! We'll try a little experiment!"

THE thing that happened was amazing to The Whisperer. There were so many easy methods of torture, he could not then understand what vagary of the hunchback's mind had led him to devise this one.

For the Whisperer had been swiftly lowered from the houseboat to the rotten piling in the darkness. From the conversation of the five men, it seemed that some pressing business required the attention of their leader at some other place during the next hour.

And during that hour, The Whisperer was to remain bound to the piling under the old wharf. His arms were tightly secured, with cords passed around the piling. One cord encircled his neck. His feet were drawn back around the piling. A gag was thrust between his teeth.

"By the time we return," promised one of the muffled voices, "you will either talk or drown!"

The Whisperer could hear his captors clumping away along the wharf. He was suddenly filled with an agony of apprehension. Had the rosebud gang, in some manner while he was unconscious, discovered his true identity? Was that the reason for leaving him in this position?

Perhaps even now they were headed for the penthouse of old Quick Trigger. Could it have been the hunchback had not revealed all he knew? Or were they intending to search the rooms where Roma Tremont had found him?

The Whisperer could feel the slap of the flooding tide. He had been fastened with only his head and shoulders above the water. The gag, firmly held in his mouth, prevented his crying out. If he had, there was none on the silent waterfront to hear, except those remaining on the houseboat.

The Whisperer could feel the barnacles on the piling grinding into his back. The water was cold enough to begin chilling his tightly bound limbs. He attempted working the gag out of his mouth by twisting his head against the piling, but had no success.

Voices murmured faintly from the nearby houseboat. The Whisperer judged the treacherous Roma Tremont and the old man he had seen had been left with the girl, Maralyn Andrews.

The cold water crept slowly higher; little waves tapped under his chin. He got the first taste of salt in his mouth. Now he was convinced that if the gang was on its way to raid the rooms of Quick Trigger, the five men would not return in time. If his underworld hideout was being searched, again the tide would be too fast.

A little higher wave sent strangling water through the gag.

AT this moment two glittering eyes were fixed upon the black and yellow houseboat. With the departure of the five men who had been masked, a small, black body had padded across the wharf.

Boru, the Scotty, was looking through a square window. There he saw the raven-haired woman who had attempted to poison him. In this cabin room was another girl and an old man. The other girl was brown-eyed, gentle in appearance. She had been freed of cords that had bound her. She was confronting the other woman in an attitude of defiance.

Boru showed uncanny understanding of this scene by his deep, throaty growl and bared fangs. No doubt, the Scotty hated that black-haired gun moll. He had seen her threaten his master.

Possibly Boru would have gone through that window, but there came a strangling, whistling sound from under the wharf. It was repeated. Boru cocked his ears an instant; then he jumped.

The Whisperer was expelling breath through his loosened gag as the water lapped at his mouth. Boru's black body splashed as he dived. The dog whined and swam toward his master. He raised his furry, black head and barked sharply.

The Whisperer was powerless. In a few seconds more, he knew the tide would engulf his face, fill his lungs. The black dog paddled close, started pulling at the cord around his throat.

Again Boru barked sharply. At his second bark, another heavier body splashed into the water.

Partly stripped, Roma Tremont swam the few yards from the houseboat to the piling. She was almost invisible in the darkness, but Boru snapped at her viciously.

The gun moll flashed a gleaming knife. The Whisperer, helpless, strained at his bindings. His thought was that the woman intended killing the dog, as well as him. He was amazed when her knife slipped through the cords holding his arms. She spoke huskily.

"I'll get you out! The fools! They went to your hideout! They'd let you drown! I'll get you away and then we'll—"

The Whisperer's arms and limbs were numbed. Boru would have slashed the gun moll, but this was not so easy in the water. Roma Tremont helped The Whisperer up on one side of the houseboat. He pulled himself from the water. He lifted Boru to the houseboat's deck.

Neither Roma Tremont nor The Whisperer saw a rowboat stealing along the side of the wharf. In this rowboat was the hunchbacked John Smith. He seemed to have come back alone. He had a long knife lying on the seat beside him. The rowboat was headed for the place where The Whisperer had been bound to the piling.

ON the side deck, The Whisperer hissed out his thanks to the gun moll. Her act of rescue had been strange indeed. Then he got a quick explanation that made it seem different.

"So you have all of that fortune map!" said the woman quickly. "Then we'll get away! The fools! I know what they do, where to find that lake! We'll get there and there'll only be two of us to share the money!"

From inside the houseboat came a girl's little scream. Maralyn Andrews had seen the queer face of The Whisperer. An old man was attempting to hold her. The Whisperer pushed to the doorway.

"Leave her here!" snapped Roma Tremont. "We must get away while we can! They'll be back any minute now!"

The hunchback in the rowboat was close to the piling under the wharf. Apparently he had not yet seen The Whisperer on the houseboat. But feet in soft-soled shoes suddenly slapped along the wharf.

Roma Tremont was outlined against the cabin window light. She had uttered a harsh laugh.

"Why, that lake is—"

The Whisperer heard the rippling *crack!* of an automatic. One of the gun moll's red earrings seemed to be driven into her throat. Scarlet blood gushed and matched the ruby jewel. Roma Tremont must have been dead before her plunging body struck in the black river.

CHAPTER XIII
ISLAND IN THE DARK

BULLETS pounded into the houseboat. Lead whistled past the head of The Whisperer. He knew Roma Tremont had died instantly. Her greed had saved his life perhaps, but it had earned her only death.

Inside the cabin, Maralyn Andrews tore her slender body free from the old man. Her dress stripped from her shoulders. Apparently the gentle girl had been terrified by the appearance of The Whisperer. She screamed again as she sprang from the other side of the houseboat.

More automatics were cracking. The shadows of the rosebud gang were within a few yards. The Whisperer lifted his hands and dived deeply. Boru splashed after his master. The Whisperer went under the hull of the houseboat,

He knew the girl who had jumped must be Maralyn Andrews. He had seen the girl only when she had had a wig of bleached blond hair and a violent yellow dress. That was when she had visited the dead Lannis Jacklin at the police station.

Or had Lannis Jacklin been dead when she arrived?

But the detectives had described Maralyn Andrews. The Whisperer shot to the surface out in the river. He had a glimpse of the girl's white face, her flashing white arms and shoulders.

The Whisperer had wiry muscles, tremendous strength, but the experience at the piling had weakened him. He made slow progress in overtaking Maralyn Andrews. But the girl was a strong swimmer, apparently. She was stroking desperately to escape.

Boru swam close to his master. A rowboat bumped under the wharf by the houseboat and the hunchbacked John Smith swore in round oaths. Four others of the rosebud gang were spanging bullets into the river. But the darkness concealed their targets.

The incoming tide was flooding strongly. Maralyn Andrews was being swept with it into the mile-wide river when The Whisperer reached her. The girl's face was a white blot of terror.

She attempted to dive, to escape. The eerie whispering voice that was meant to reassure, only added to her fear. The tidal current was boiling into whirlpools. The Whisperer dived, seeking the girl. His hands tangled in her flowing hair.

AS they came to the surface, Maralyn Andrews clawed at The Whisperer's face. He might now have informed her he was Wildcat Gordon, the police commissioner. She would not have believed him. And it was still vitally important that he maintain his identity.

It became necessary to jolt the girl's round skull

with the butt of one hand to prevent her pulling them under.

Maralyn Andrews sighed and became partly unconscious. The strong current swung their bodies outward in the river. This for the moment was their only salvation.

The Whisperer heard the explosive thudding of a motor boat. The rosebud gang must have been leaving the houseboat. Mingled with the motor boat's beat came the creaking of oars in a skiff. These boats were coming out, zigzagging.

For a time there was no light. The Whisperer managed to keep the limp body of the girl on the surface. He had a flat, silenced gun concealed against his body, and it had not been found. With this in one hand, The Whisperer fought to widen the distance from the searching boats.

The wise Boru seemed to understand his master was swimming under a heavy handicap. The Scotty caught his teeth in the girl's few garments and swam strongly beside them. This helped keep them on the surface and carried them along.

From the motor boat, a hand flashlight sent out a beam. This missed revealing the swimmers, but it showed a rowboat with one man at the oars. He was John Smith, the hunchback, and he must have been familiar with the river currents. The rowboat was much closer than the motor boat.

The Whisperer knew when Maralyn Andrews again became conscious. She did not attempt to struggle again. Her face was childlike, beautiful. It made The Whisperer think of Tiny Traeger. And it made it seem almost incredible she could have worn a blond wig and perhaps have thrust a stiletto through the heart of Lannis Jacklin.

Yet The Whisperer knew this gentle girl had the motive of years of poverty, of the loss of her father for such a killing. If she had killed Lannis Jacklin, no jury, knowing the justice of it, would ever have convicted her.

Suddenly a bright, broad searchlight lanced the fog. The siren of a police launch screamed. The houseboat shooting had been heard. The police beam picked up the motor boat.

The Whisperer estimated the tidal current had swept the girl and him more than a mile. He knew there were several islands somewhere close by. That afforded his only hope of evading the rosebud gang and, at the same time, eluding his own river police.

But he could not yet make out the bulk of these islands.

Police voices barked commands. Several shots were laid across the bow of the motorboat. Then, from this latter craft, came the crashing of a machine gun.

The stream of slugs shattered the police searchlight. In the midst of the shooting, the men in the motor boat must have cut their engine and drifted.

The coppers bellowed oaths, searching for the smaller craft. The Whisperer saw the dark bulk of an island. Here the tidal current raced through a narrowing channel. They were being carried safely away from both the rosebud gang and the police.

Then the rowboat of John Smith, the hunchback, loomed out of the gray river mist. The hunchback ceased rowing, got a flashlight beam playing across the whirlpools. He cried out harshly as this spotted the heads of Maralyn Andrews, The Whisperer and the black Boru. The rowboat shot toward them.

THE boat was much faster than their swimming. The curved bow was driving toward The Whisperer's body.

"Keep quiet" he whispered into the girl's ear. "I'll stop him!"

He trained the silenced gun directly upon the figure of the hunchbacked rower. His hand was already squeezing the weapon with its sibilant, hissing death.

"No! No!" screamed Maralyn Andrews, one white hand clawing at his arm.

The automatic hissed, but the girl's movement pulled them under. The Whisperer could feel the rowboat moving over them. His head emerged close alongside the skiff. A blow exploded on his skull.

The hunchback had struck downward with an oar. It landed with a force that broke the blade. Blazing lights glowed for an instant before The Whisperer's eyes. Then he was floating in a helpless coma, having only the strength to prevent pulling water into his lungs.

At this moment, the motor boat, having eluded the police launch, glided close. John Smith, the hunchback, swore violently and drove the skiff away from the swimmers with his remaining oar. The Whisperer expected Maralyn Andrews would immediately seize upon this opportunity to escape.

The girl had pulled away. But the loyal Scotty whined and remained swimming about the helpless Whisperer. Maralyn Andrews hesitated.

The shore of an island was sweeping past. Something about the black dog's staunch loyalty must have inspired the girl to do as she did.

She had recovered her strength, and she was a good swimmer. The Whisperer felt himself being pulled into shallow water. He was helpless, almost paralyzed. His head throbbed painfully. When the girl left him quickly, running away from the shore, he was barely conscious.

The island had considerable extent. In past years it apparently had been a summer estate. What had once been a mansion had become a tumble-down ruin.

When Maralyn Andrews left The Whisperer on the shore, with the loyal Boru beside him, she fled in the darkness toward the old house.

The girl displayed a strange familiarity with the island. For she had followed a weed-grown path. Her breath was sobbing. Only a few garments

The automatic hissed, but the girl's movement pulled them under.

clung to her white body as she apparently found a hiding place near the old house.

The Whisperer revived in a few minutes. He was still in a dazed condition when he staggered to his feet. Followed by Boru, he made his way through a brush thicket. His only impulse then was to get away from the river.

At this moment, he was not sure but that Maralyn Andrews had been drowned. Pushing through the undergrowth, he stumbled into water. At this time, he thought he had returned to the river. But he discovered the water to be fresh.

After a reviving drink, The Whisperer found a dry rock and sat down upon it. His reasoning faculties slowly returned. For the present, he seemed to be safe enough, but he realized nothing had been accomplished.

Roma Tremont had been killed. Maralyn Andrews was dead, or so he believed then. Gradually, his senses became clear. Some trees showed against the sky. A late half-moon was rising.

Suddenly there came to The Whisperer an uncanny sense of being familiar with this place. He was looking at two blackened stumps. They had the appearance of having been there for years. A tall tree stood between them. Water lapped at the rock on which he was sitting. And that water was fresh.

The Whisperer expelled a sharp breath and stood erect. The stumps, the tree, the rock, and there was no doubt but this was a small lake in the island.

"It's impossible, fantastic!" he whispered to himself. "But it matches up! If I had the map—"

Then he knew he did not need the torn map. His memory was sharp. Five minutes later, he had plunged around the shore of the little lake. He had to guess at lining up the rock with the stumps and the tree, but he walked the required distance several times.

Inch by inch, he went over the soft ground in the darkness. His hand struck a cold bit of metal. It was a peg, driven deep into the ground. Not many minutes were wasted before he had found a small ridge of shale rock and a flat stone in the middle of this.

The Whisperer's fingers became bloody as he dug into the earth under the stone. But his hands encountered a flat, rusted box. It had become so rusted that its lid came off in his hands.

The Whisperer had only a small flashlight that had not been removed. His silenced gun had gone down in the river. But under the tiny light, he found a faded paper containing the names of seven men. Seven men of whom he had never heard in his police career.

Could these have been the original members of the red rosebud gang?

He believed they must be. The only other items in the box were a small brass key and a receipt, old and faded.

"The warehouse murders!" murmured The Whisperer. "So that is the answer!" The receipt was for the storage of a trunk and the date indicated it was of some sixteen years before.

The name on the warehouse receipt was not that of Lannis Jacklin. It was simply Arthur Jones. The Whisperer had the whole picture now.

Lannis Jacklin had placed a trunk in a warehouse. The members of the rosebud gang had searched for it. But there were many warehouses, hundreds of old trunks. They had not been given the name on the receipt.

The Whisperer was stuffing the paper with the seven names into a soggy pocket. He changed his mind swiftly. From three different directions the underbrush crackled. Voices growled in the darkness. Flashlight beams started dancing.

UNARMED, The Whisperer slid over the shale rock and into a small pit. He stuffed the paper with the seven names into his mouth and swallowed it. The names were safe in his memory.

Boru growled, before The Whisperer could silence him. The dog was heard in the silence of the island. One man and another called out. The brush crackled nearer. Then The Whisperer heard Maralyn Andrews scream shrilly. Her voice was instantly silenced.

He had thought the girl was drowned. The Whisperer pulled the Scotty dog to him. Boru wore what appeared to be a flat collar. But underneath, the leather concealed a pocket. The brass trunk key and the warehouse receipt went into the pocket.

Then The Whisperer deliberately stood erect and sent the rusty box hurtling into the brush. The noise brought men rushing upon him from three sides. In the

darkness, The Whisperer identified only John Smith, the hunchback.

Another man was carrying the limp body of Maralyn Andrews in his arms. Guns and flashlights showed. The Whisperer could do nothing but slowly raise his hands.

The hunchback let out a snarling oath. Slipping quickly behind the trapped Whisperer, the queerly deformed man struck him viciously over the head with the flat of an automatic.

THE WHISPERER was unaware when he was placed in a rowboat. This skiff was attached to a motorboat by a towing line. Boru, the Scotty, narrowly escaped death. The loyal black dog flew at his master's captors with bared fangs.

One man attempted to shoot the dog, but strangely enough, it was the hunchback who saved him. Boru was permitted to crouch in the rowboat beside his master. The unconscious Maralyn Andrews was also put into the boat.

"If we make it out of this damned mess," growled one of the men, "we've got them both! This time we'll make The Whisperer talk, if we have to carve him up by inches! He knows what was in that buried box! If we wait to hunt for it, the cops will have the island surrounded!"

The balked police were at this moment coming close. They had traced the motorboat gang to the island. But the police launch was around a rocky point when the motorboat chugged into the river and headed back for the city waterfront.

The Whisperer came to his senses with the jolting impact of shooting close by. The light from a police launch was playing upon the motor boat. Members of the gang were using a machine gun.

But the police light sliced a white beam across it.

The Whisperer heard one of the rosebud gang call out.

"Drop the skiff! We'll pick it up! I'm blasting 'em!"

Was it the voice of the hunchback that cried out in protest? The Whisperer could not be sure. The movement of the rowboat ceased. Its towline had been dropped. As the skiff whirled away on the current, there came a tearing blast.

A small bomb had hit the police launch. Apparently the explosion put the launch motor out of commission.

CHAPTER XIV
THE RETURN OF WILDCAT

WILDCAT GORDON drove a small roadster through the doors of old Quick Trigger's warehouse. When the doors had shut out the morning sunlight, he opened the rumble seat of the little car and lifted out the limp body of Maralyn Andrews.

It was now near the hour of noon. Wildcat Gordon was dressed in a suit of bright blue serge. His army hat was cocked over one eye. A new red necktie and a vivid carnation gave him a jauntiness that covered the soreness of his much-battered skull.

Wildcat had dropped the guise of The Whisperer at one of his underworld hideouts. There he had also left the dog Boru. His escape from the river with Maralyn Andrews had been accomplished swiftly.

For the red rosebud gang had searched vainly for the drifting rowboat after the police launch had been disabled. The Whisperer had recovered in the nick of time to row quickly ashore. He had been able to leave Maralyn Andrews hidden until he had reached one of his several parked roadsters.

The unconscious girl had remained hidden in the rumble seat as The Whisperer had again become Wildcat Gordon.

With Maralyn Andrews in his arms, more scantily clad than a girl should have been, Wildcat walked into Quick Trigger's penthouse. Old Quick Trigger eyed him silently for a minute.

"I've got another patient for Tiny," stated Wildcat, calmly. "Assuming that I'm still police commissioner, it might be well to get on the job."

THE brown eyes of Tiny Traeger flashed when she saw Maralyn Andrews.

"Being police commissioner seems to have a lot of privileges!" said Tiny, scornfully. "Out all night again, and that girl isn't even dressed decently! I'll have nothing to do with her!"

Nevertheless, the angry Tiny gave the unconscious Maralyn Andrews every attention.

"There isn't time to explain," stated Wildcat.

"There are some things you can't explain!" snapped Tiny.

There were others besides Tiny Traeger who were convinced Wildcat had several things he could not explain. Wildcat remained only long enough to discover that Phineas T. Hoyle was still unconscious and had not been discovered. Also that Deputy Henry Bolton was having his hands full of new trouble.

Wildcat went immediately to headquarters. He had the feel of a brass trunk key, a warehouse receipt in his pocket. The possession of these gave him confidence there soon would be a breaking of the red rosebud murder cases.

Even the sarcastic greeting from a rumpled Mayor Van Royston could not shake his conviction he was close to the end of what had been a bewildering trail.

Wildcat Gordon would not have been so confident

had he known that all of his movements had been trailed by one member of the red rosebud gang. This was no other than John Smith, the hunchback.

Following the escape of the gang from the river, this John Smith had used his head. He had judged where the missing rowboat might have been put ashore. And he had arrived in time to pick up the trail of The Whisperer as he had departed with Maralyn Andrews in his roadster.

Strangely enough, the hunchback had made no single-handed effort to recapture the girl. Nor had he made contact with or informed others of the rosebud gang of what he had discovered.

But John Smith, the hunchback, had seen Wildcat Gordon, or as he then believed, The Whisperer, drive his roadster into the warehouse on which was located Quick Trigger's penthouse.

At this time, there is no doubt but that the hunchback had not connected The Whisperer with Wildcat Gordon. He had been able only to trail the roadster and had not been aware of The Whisperer's changed appearance.

Now, at the moment Wildcat Gordon appeared at his office, the hunchback was shadowing Quick Trigger's residence, wholly unaware this also was the home of the police commissioner.

MAYOR VAN ROYSTON was a much rumpled man. Apparently, he had passed the night pacing up and down his police commissioner's office.

Toby Carron, the dapper lawyer, was poised on the edge of a chair, gnawing at his thumbnail. Carron showed a sardonic smile as Wildcat Gordon entered his office. Deputy Henry Bolton got out of the commissioner's big chair with a reluctant movement, as if he felt he had been placed there permanently.

Wildcat seated himself and swung his yellow shoes onto the desk.

"I see by the morning papers you haven't got The Whisperer yet, Henry," observed Wildcat mildly, punching some tobacco into his stubby pipe and sending out an odorous cloud.

Henry Bolton's eyes were bloodshot. The battle on the river had added its mystery to his burden.

"Gordon," announced Mayor Van Royston, "the boys held a meeting last night. We could not locate you. They want an immediate explanation for your personal inaction, or you will be directly requested to resign!"

Wildcat's head was aching; his cocked army hat covered some mighty sore bruises.

"I felt I needed a little rest, so I got it, Mayor!" he snapped. "Now the rest of you look like you needed some sleep! Henry, you will be off duty until tomorrow night! Carron, I especially want you to get out of this office and stay out of it, unless I send for you!"

"What? What?" gasped Mayor Van Royston. "Deputy Bolton has this Whisperer case in hand. Someone has to get at the bottom of these murders! Deputy Bolton has had to place special patrols around several storage warehouses! Another watchman was assaulted last night!"

Wildcat's hand had the feel of the brass trunk key in his pocket. So his own men were especially guarding the warehouses?

Toby Carron got to his small feet and looked sneeringly at Wildcat Gordon.

"You're telling me to get out?" he said, ironically. "Gordon, that's the last insult you will hand out to me! You and your friend, Judge Kyley, are the ones who are on the way out!"

Wildcat's chunky body bounced from his chair. Toby Carron's eyes were still purple from his encounter with Judge Kyley.

"Gordon!" shouted Mayor Van Royston. "You can't do that! Carron is right! He—"

But by this time, Toby Carron was on his hands and knees in the corridor outside of Wildcat's office. Wildcat had assisted him there with one hand on his collar and the other on the slack of his well-creased trousers. A booting, yellow shoe gave the dapper criminal lawyer further assistance on his way.

"Clear out, Henry," Wildcat roared at Deputy Bolton.

Deputy Henry Bolton cleared out, accompanied by the rumpled Mayor Van Royston.

"I'm leaving, Gordon," stated the mayor. "I have no means today of preventing your disgusting violence, but tomorrow—"

"Tomorrow will take care of itself," interrupted Wildcat. "If the rosebud murders are not cleared up within twenty-four hours, Henry Bolton can have this job, and welcome! In the meantime, I don't want any Toby Carrons or any other shyster crime aides getting in the way!"

IT must have seemed like an impossible boast. Wildcat Gordon had announced the rosebud murders would be cleared up within twenty-four hours. Perhaps even the loyal Sergeant Thorsen became dubious after the office had been emptied.

During the long afternoon, Wildcat Gordon remained at his desk. But there was no action begun or promised. In fact, the weary Wildcat had his yellow shoes stretched before him, the door locked against reporters, and he slept.

Wildcat needed that sleep.

Darkness had slapped down over the city when Wildcat yawned and came awake. He consulted a written slip he had prepared.

That slip told him the Phalanx Storage Co. warehouse was under double police guard.

"Sergeant Thorsen, have twenty squad car reserves on call all night at the Fiftieth Precinct station!" he ordered. "I'm going out!"

He had reached the door, when he turned and added, "And you will pull all of the men on that Phalanx Storage Co. warehouse on the precinct reserve! Be ready to move instantly when you hear from me!"

Sergeant Thorsen's wooden face betrayed no emotion. His slaty eyes flickered a little.

"The men will be ready for instant action, chief!" he said.

Sergeant Thorsen might have been expected to question the commissioner's order. But Sergeant Thorsen had been in the Army. He never questioned a command. He only obeyed.

The sergeant did not know how much depended upon his strict obedience when, an hour later, the roadster of Wildcat Gordon rolled into the narrow canyon of a warehouse district street. The little car was parked in an alleyway.

Against the gray fog drifting from the river, the gray figure emerging from Wildcat's car was almost indistinguishable. For the bright blue serge suit, the red necktie and the army hat were gone. The Whisperer followed his peculiarly jutting chin along the deserted street.

Before the towering building of the Phalanx Storage Co., The Whisperer paused. A ghostly chuckle was emitted as he glanced up and down the street. He could see the figures of patrolmen at storage warehouses in the next block. Alone of all these, the Phalanx stood unguarded.

For more than a quarter of a century, the huge Phalanx warehouse had been in business. That accounted for the ponderous locks on its doors being old-fashioned. But because of possible night business, there was one small door that gave access to the office.

The Whisperer discovered this door had been locked. His quick hands and a pointed steel instrument made quick work of the lock. A light burned inside the office. As he entered, The Whisperer heard the tramping steps of a watchman back in the main building.

The Whisperer knelt before a steel filing case. He had gone through a hundred dusty cards before he came to the name of Arthur Jones. He had the filing number of a trunk, and on the card was a description.

The Whisperer had been deeply engaged in his task. The door leading into the office opened suddenly. The bulky figure of a watchman stepped into the office.

"What the hell—you—"

The burly watchman gulped out the words. No doubt he could see The Whisperer's gray figure indistinctly. But as he spoke, the man clawed for the revolver he carried in a leather holster.

THE WHISPERER left the floor with a spring from his toes. He could see the revolver coming into the watchman's hand. With the murders there had been, the recent alarm of prowlers, there was but little hope of argument.

The watchman outweighed The Whisperer by many pounds. But weight suddenly counted for nothing. The Whisperer's body streaked through the air. His solid bone and muscle became a catapulted projectile which caught the watchman in his midriff.

At the same time, the Whisperer's right fist shot up accurately. The watchman's big head rolled with the punch and he went over, but he was clinging to his revolver. The muzzle of this slapped across The Whisperer's ear, but the weapon did not explode.

Fingers like the grip of a steel trap fastened on the man's gun wrist. The result was regrettable, but unavoidable. A bone snapped as The Whisperer made a mental note that the police commissioner's office would later have to give this fellow special care.

A padded blackjack arose and fell. The Whisperer took the watchman's revolver and rolled the inert body out of the light.

Perhaps fifteen minutes later, a small trunk with ancient brass straps and the construction of a score of years before was pulled to the open floor of the warehouse. A small brass key grated in the lock.

When the lid was raised, The Whisperer emitted a whistling gasp of amazement. Every angle of the red rosebud murders had pointed to some unusual treasure. But not even that had led The Whisperer to suspect the incredible evidence of it that was displayed.

CHAPTER XV
THE TRAPPING OF TINY

"MILLIONS!"

The word was an eerie, sibilant whisper through the vast space of the huge, old warehouse. The Whisperer slapped the lid of the old trunk shut. He repeated that fantastic word.

"Millions!"

But this was not the time or place to examine the trunk's contents. Sergeant Thorsen would obey orders. But some of the police on patrol in the street might suddenly decide to have a look at the now unguarded Phalanx building.

The Whisperer threw the brass-bound trunk to his shoulder. And though he had said, "Millions!"

the weight of the small trunk did not appear to be great. For the gold certificates of a score of years ago, when this was still legal tender, could amount to a great deal packed into a small space.

Likewise, millions in diamonds need not be more than one man could carry easily. The Whisperer knew that the greater part of the trunk's weight was caused by the plates he had seen. The most perfectly engraved counterfeiting plates on which his eyes had ever fallen.

Yet he had been convinced the gold notes he had glimpsed were genuine. He must get the strange treasure to a safe spot for examination before undertaking the final bold stroke that would untangle the mystery of the red rosebud gang.

Yet at this moment, The Whisperer was filled with grim humor. Within a short time, the night watchman would revive. An alarm would be given. And when the police were aroused, he wanted it known that The Whisperer had struck again, under the noses of the police guards that had been placed by Deputy Henry Bolton.

Carrying the trunk, the gray figure seemed to drift with the gray fog of the night along the vast buildings. When the rumble seat top of his roadster had closed on the trunk, The Whisperer moved the little car to a safe distance.

MINUTES later, The Whisperer again stood near the office of The Phalanx Storage Co. His figure merged with a building across the narrow street. Now his right hand whipped back. The half of a brick flew through the air. It brought a resounding, splintering crash.

The big glass window in the Phalanx office was shattered. It had almost the effect of an explosion in the street.

Immediately there came shouts, the pounding of feet. Two patrolmen were running from the next block. Guns in hand, they converged upon the sound of the crash.

Both coppers saw the smashed window. One shouted, "They've got another watchman! Come on!"

A sibilant, penetrating whisper seemed to come from nowhere and everywhere.

"Stay bark! Death awaits inside!"

The patrolmen dropped, crouching, peering into the Phalanx office.

"The Whisperer again!" exclaimed one of the coppers.

There was awe in his voice. Both patrolmen apparently could see the watchman lying on the floor in the office. It had seemed to them the eerie voice of The Whisperer had come from inside the Phalanx building.

Other patrolmen were pounding along the street. The Whisperer chuckled in his throat and faded between the buildings on the opposite side of the street.

In a short time, it would be known that The Whisperer had removed that trunk which had been held for years for Lannis Jacklin under the name of Arthur Jones.

The rosebud gang would know it quickly. Which was exactly what The Whisperer desired.

The roadster carrying The Whisperer and the fantastic treasure slipped easily away from the police converging on the Phalanx warehouse.

Leaving the pandemonium in the warehouse street, the roadster shot across town. Before the police had the story of what had happened from the befuddled watchman with the broken wrist, The Whisperer stopped his car near a drugstore.

He was unnoticed as he entered a telephone booth. Slipping his curious dental plates from his mouth, he dialed the number of old Quick Trigger's penthouse. He could hear the phone ringing, but minutes passed and there was no reply.

The Whisperer waited and tried again. Still he got no response. A deep crease appeared between his eyes.

With Phineas T. Hoyle and Maralyn Andrews being cared for by Quick Trigger and Tiny, there should have been an instant reply. They would have been on the alert for a call from him.

The Whisperer replaced his dental plates. He emerged from the phone booth and got quickly to the roadster. Cold fear for the safety of Quick Trigger and Tiny clutched at his heart.

"If anything's happened," he whispered, "they'll never have to heat the chair for him!"

He did not name anyone, yet it seemed The Whisperer had one man in mind rather than those of the red rose bud gang.

He was now trapped by a situation that demanded immediate and careful procedure. The brass-bound trunk must be safely hidden. He could not, even as police commissioner, issue an order for his own police to go to Quick Trigger's penthouse.

The Whisperer was swearing silently as he stopped the car in an alley near the hideout where he had placed the dog Boru. As he removed the trunk, he swore again at the delay it had caused.

ABOUT the time The Whisperer was opening the brass-bound trunk in the Phalanx warehouse, John Smith, the hunchback, proved to be almost uncanny in his manner by entering the warehouse and penthouse of old Quick Trigger.

For hours, he had watched and waited, until he had solved the means of using the regular elevator to the roof.

At this time, there is no doubt but that the

hunchback fully believed this was one of the hideouts of The Whisperer. He could not have suspected this also was the residence of Police Commissioner Gordon. And knowing that Maralyn Andrews had been taken into this penthouse, the furtive, fast-moving hunchback got onto the roof.

Fate played directly into the hunchback's hands. Old Quick Trigger strolled onto his roof for a bit of air. His bald pate was a shining mark in the night. The hunchback, with his bearded face and the brown mole under his left eye, acted swiftly.

Quick Trigger was gravely disturbed by the position in which Wildcat Gordon had been placed. But he had no suspicion that anyone had trailed The Whisperer to the penthouse. So when a revolver butt crashed on his shiny head, Quick Trigger passed out so quickly he had no sense of what had happened.

A few seconds later, the hunchback was peering through a penthouse window. He was looking into the room where Maralyn Andrews had been given a chance to recuperate. The girl had not been seriously hurt.

As the hunchback saw her, there was something strange about Maralyn Andrews. Though a gentle, lovely young woman, it would seem Maralyn had a vast amount of grit and determination. She was lying on a bed, apparently asleep, but her eyes gleamed through slitted lids.

The gentle Maralyn Andrews was watching Tiny Traeger with the attitude of some sleek cat about to pounce. Maralyn knew herself to be in the hands of The Whisperer, so no doubt she believed Tiny Traeger to be one of his aides.

The hunchback moved swiftly to another window. Then oaths rolled from his bearded lips. He was looking at the gray, wrinkled face of Phineas T. Hoyle, who was lying on a cot.

Suddenly the hunchback was back and slipping through the hallway of the penthouse. Tiny Traeger did not hear the opening of the door of the room in which she was caring for Maralyn Andrews, or if she did, she must have believed it was Quick Trigger coming in from the roof.

Tiny was given no opportunity to cry out. The incredibly strong hands of the hunchback closed about her throat.

THEN a strange thing happened.

Maralyn Andrews sprang from the bed. It seemed then she must have feared The Whisperer more than the red rosebud gang, or at least this hunchback. For she helped wrap Tiny Traeger securely in some of the bedclothing.

Maralyn Andrews apparently went willingly with John Smith, the hunchback. She assisted him when he also wrapped Phineas T. Hoyle in blankets. Within ten minutes after Quick Trigger had been knocked unconscious, Tiny Traeger and Phineas T. Hoyle were wrapped bundles in the rear of a closed sedan.

And Maralyn Andrews was riding in the seat beside John Smith, the hunchback. The hunchback drove rapidly toward the section of the city in which lay the second hideout of The Whisperer. This was the unsavory roominghouse to which the hunchback had trailed The Whisperer when he came from the river with Maralyn Andrews.

Though she had fought to escape from the red rosebud gang, Maralyn Andrews seemed to be under some strange influence of the hunchback.

Quick words passed between them. Then the hunchback left the girl in the sedan with the two prisoners, as he made his way swiftly toward the rooms to which he had seen The Whisperer take his dog, Boru.

Unfortunately for whatever understanding there may have been between Maralyn Andrews and the hunchback, the girl had been seen in the sedan. Another car had passed the sedan, then quickly turned and trailed it. This trailing car did not arrive near the parked sedan until after the hunchback had disappeared.

Now two men emerged from the trailing car. If they were of the red rosebud gang, they were not now wearing this identifying mark. Perhaps the reason for that was past. Anyway, wearing a red rosebud had become a dangerous pastime, with the police hot on the scent of the wholesale murderers.

Maralyn Andrews did not have a chance to scream. A man appeared on each side of the sedan. A sack suddenly was slapped over the girl's head and she was pushed to the floor. When the two men discovered the prisoners in the rear, there were jubilant oaths.

One man drove the sedan rapidly away. The other rejoined the others in the trailing car. There were four of these men, one an old fellow, the same who had guarded Maralyn Andrews in the houseboat before her escape.

This gang car started cruising slowly about the neighborhood. Without doubt they were awaiting the reappearance of the hunchback. They may not have known he was seeking The Whisperer, but the circumstance of his having recaptured Maralyn Andrews left no doubt but that he was close on The Whisperer's trail.

Because of these happenings, of which he had known nothing, The Whisperer had been unable to get a phone reply from Quick Trigger's penthouse. He had made several calls. Also, he had employed some time examining the contents of the brass-bound trunk.

CHAPTER XVI
A BOX FOR THE POLICE

"MILLIONS!"

The Whisperer had repeated this magic word several times as he went through the contents of the brass-bound trunk. He had opened it the second time in the rooms to which he had brought his dog Boru from the river.

Perhaps no trunk of similar dimensions had ever contained so great a fortune. There were bundles of gold notes of a thousand dollars each. There were other packages of the most secure of government bonds that had been issued twenty years before.

Apparently, the criminal gang, of which Lannis Jacklin must have been the leader, had converted part of a vast fortune into these bonds and notes. The Whisperer estimated there were other millions in several pouches of unset, finest diamonds.

But not all of the money in the trunk was good. There were packages of counterfeit banknotes, so cleverly printed even The Whisperer had to make several tests to be sure. There were plates of the most expert engraving, from which these notes had been printed.

There were also some jewels that had been listed for years on police records as stolen.

The Whisperer, his dental plates removed, talked to his dog Boru as if the animal were human.

"I'm not surprised, Boru," he said, "that a man like Attorney Martin Mudge would make a strong play for this fortune. I'll bet some of this rosebud gang confided in the lawyer, in an effort to get their hands on Lannis Jacklin. And the old convict was smart enough to keep the fortune from his own gang, hiding it on the very estate from which much of it was taken. That island was once owned by Burton Sedrick Andrews."

The Whisperer was replacing the fortune in the trunk that had contained it during all of the years Lannis Jacklin had been in State prison.

For the moment, he considered himself safe from observation. He did not suspect any of the activities of John Smith, the hunchback.

The Whisperer's back was turned toward a dirty window that led to a fire escape. Boru was lying with his black ears cocked, his liquid eyes seeming to understand all that his master had been saying.

From Boru's throat came a warning snarl. The dog leaped up. The Whisperer swung his eyes toward the locked door, a hand seeking one of his silenced automatics. But the glass of the window crashed. A hoarse voice spoke.

"Stick 'em up, and keep 'em there!"

JOHN SMITH, the hunchback, edged through the broken glass. His eyes gleamed malevolently. He held a revolver pointed directly at The Whisperer. It was easy to read he was prepared to deal out instant death.

The Whisperer slowly raised his empty hands.

If the smart black Boru had instantly leaped upon the intruder, he probably would have been shot dead. The dog had been taught many smart tricks by his master. Now Boru cringed, whined and crept to one side of the room.

The dog's ears drooped. He was the picture of fear. His black body slunk close to the floor.

The Whisperer was keeping his face averted, so that the hunchback had a poor view of it. He had removed his dental plates. Except for his gray-powdered hair and his gray attire, he was Wildcat Gordon. He knew the hunchback had seen him as Wildcat Gordon.

There had to be fast action, or the whole game he had been playing was lost. The Whisperer bent his head and did not speak.

An avaricious gleam came into the eyes of the hunchback as he saw the contents of the brass-bound trunk. A whistling breath was expelled from his lungs. The fortune spread before him seemed to set the hunchback's body trembling.

The Whisperer had been watching keenly for that shifting of the intruder's eyes. He heard the hunchback speak.

"Then you got it—you've got it! I should kill you now!"

The Whisperer was looking into the black eyes of the cringing Boru. The Whisperer's left eye closed in a slow wink. At the same instant, one of his feet toed against a heavy counterfeiting plate.

Two objects flew toward John Smith, the hunchback. One was the black, furry body of Boru. The other was the counterfeiting plate, shot with all the strength of The Whisperer's toe.

The Whisperer felt the shock of a revolver bullet jolting into the mulseles near his right breast.

But the hunchback dropped his revolver and fell. The heavy counterfeiting plate had struck him heavily across the throat. At the same instant, the white fangs of Boru snapped shut on the muscles of his right arm.

John Smith hit the floor, and a blackjack snapped from The Whisperer's sleeve and thudded across the back of his skull.

"Drop it, Boru!" came the command. John Smith

was out cold. The Whisperer restored his dental plates. He was sure now the red rosebud gang must be close upon his trail. He restored the contents of the trunk and locked the lid.

PERHAPS ten minutes later, The Whisperer was in the street some distance from the room in which the hunchback lay bound and guarded by Boru. The Whisperer had emerged from an underground passage some distance from his hideout. It was one of the reasons he maintained this place.

A plain, heavy wooden box was in The Whisperer's arms. Two blocks away he entered an all-night express office. He motioned with his hands, indicating he was a deaf-mute. A white card was tacked to the heavy wooden box.

The address was:

Police Commissioner James Gordon,

Police Headquarters, City.

The brass-bound trunk and its millions was out of The Whisperer's hands. He moved swiftly back to his room, entering by the underground passage.

A few minutes later, the securely bound body of John Smith, the hunchback, was crowded into the rumble seat of one of his plain roadsters. The little car was then driven to a nearby parking lot.

The Whisperer returned quickly to his room. He had bandaged the bullet wound in his shoulder. Once more, he used the telephone, dialing Quick Trigger's penthouse. This was his own private line. This time, he received a reply.

"All hell's busted loose!" came the trembling voice of old Quick Trigger. "They've got them—got Tiny, Wildcat! Where are you? We must do something!"

"Stay where you are, Quick Trigger!" snapped The Whisperer. "I'll take care of this! I thought something like that had broken loose!"

The Whisperer debated his next move swiftly. He was sure now that not only the hunchback, but others of the red rosebud gang had spotted this hideout. And he was convinced they now had Tiny Traeger, Maralyn Andrews and Hoyle.

Where would they be taken? The Whisperer knew the one object would be the discovery of the brass-bound trunk. He, himself, was the key to the millions they were seeking. And he was convinced the gang would use the most ruthless methods to compel Tiny Traeger to tell what she knew.

Where would they take the prisoners? Not to the houseboat, for that now was under police surveillance. Their new hide-out might be any of a thousand places. There was apparently no way in which this new place could be discovered.

The Whisperer thought of the hunchback imprisoned in the rumble seat of his car. But he shook his head. If the hunchback knew, he probably would not talk.

Suddenly The Whisperer uttered a ghostly laugh. He reached for his telephone. There was a way, one quick way to reach Tiny Traeger and the others. Perhaps it would mean his death, but it would be sure.

The Whisperer removed his dental plates. He dialed headquarters. Sergeant Thorsen replied.

Now, the sergeant might have been expected to explode with the latest news of The Whisperer's exploit at the Phalanx warehouse. But Sergeant Thorsen was not of the explosive kind.

"Get this straight, Sergeant Thorsen," rapped Wildcat's order. "Have Maloney and Carson go to Arbutus Avenue in ten minutes exactly. The Whisperer will be at the corner of Meredith Street and Arbutus! Maloney and Carson are to shadow him only!"

Then Wildcat swiftly described marks by which The Whisperer might be identified.

"This leads to the red rosebud gang!" stated Wildcat. "The Whisperer probably will be seized when he reaches another address!"

Wildcat then gave the block in which his hide-out was located. He was sure the rosebud gang would be watching for his appearance, for the reappearance of John Smith, the hunchback. And he was ordering two of his best men to trail—himself.

"Maloney and Carson are not to interfere with the men who seize The Whisperer!" instructed Wildcat. "But they are to trail the car of the men who get him! Tag it to wherever it goes! Then, Sergeant Thorsen, you will have the squad reserves ready for their call! Wherever The Whisperer is taken, you will personally see that the reserves smash in, and without delay!"

"I've got it, chief!" came Sergeant Thorsen's instant reply. "You know The Whisperer got a trunk?"

"I know of it, and I will be close by when the finish comes, Sergeant! Remember, an immediate smash means life or death for several persons!"

THE gray-clad Whisperer seemed oblivious of the two men standing in a dark doorway, half an hour later. He had been to Arbutus Avenue and Meredith Street. Now he was again in the block of his own hideout.

Detectives Maloney and Carson were clever tailers. Not even The Whisperer could be sure his own dicks were close upon him. But he was forced, several times, to evade other members of his own department.

A death hunt by the police was on for The Whisperer. And the hunt by the red rosebud gang would also be to the death.

The Whisperer whirled as the two men came from the dark doorway. He did not seem to live up to his reputation. His hands were not quick enough. Two automatics, in side pockets, were shoved into his body.

The command to get into a closed sedan at the end of the block was obeyed, and The Whisperer made no attempt to speak. There were three men in the closed car. One who had been in the driver's seat swiftly drew a cap low over his face. His coat collar was up. It was as good as a mask.

"You can save yourself a lot of trouble by talking now," said one of the men. "We know you have that Lannis Jacklin trunk. We are going to have it, or you'll meet up with something worse than a nice little knife through your heart."

The Whisperer did not speak. All of his efforts to glimpse a possible following car revealed nothing. He hoped that Maloney and Carson were that good. But there was the possibility they had missed him.

He knew the two detectives would obey Sergeant Thorsen's order to the letter, if there had not been some slip-up. Now it seemed there must have been. For suddenly two empty blocks stretched behind the gang car. Apparently, his captors were not being trailed.

"You'll talk plenty!" promised one of the men. "Joe, you can drive right on in. Then we'll peg the doors."

The closed car was moving swiftly. Still there was no indication of a shadow. In a deserted waterfront street, the car was whirled suddenly through the opening and closing doors of an old warehouse.

The Whisperer found himself wrapped tightly with cords. Every weapon had been removed. The warehouse jutted over the river. The Whisperer was pushed into a chair in a room where part of the old floor had rotted away. Through a wide gap, the black water could be seen shining in the light.

The Whisperer became aware the rosebud gang had added to its membership. There were eight men he counted. The original gang had only the seven names he had committed to memory. But The Whisperer was fully aware that a new and younger leader had taken command of the killers.

Four of the men present wore close masks. They were better devised than had been the crude sacks used hastily on the houseboat. But the muffled voice of the leader was the same.

"You've been plenty smart!" this masked leader said, harshly. "But the great Whisperer is finished! The other time you said you had come to make a deal! Now there will be no deal! We want that Lannis Jacklin trunk!"

The Whisperer laughed eerily. He was wondering if Detectives Maloney and Carson could possibly have followed his lead. At the last minute, it seemed that he was securely trapped. The wide door of another barren room swung open.

"We don't know who she is, but we've got a hunch the little dame's your best moll!" sneered the gang leader. "So—we're expecting you to talk through the nose!"

The Whisperer could not avoid squirming in his bonds. The cords had been passed around the wooden chair. The masked leader walked over and said, "Ready to talk now?"

THE WHISPERER was looking at the doll-like figure of Tiny Traeger. The lovely girl had been stripped to the waist, so that her curving, white back showed. Her dainty wrists had been cruelly drawn up to spikes driven in the wall and fastened with rope.

Tiny's small, perfect body twitched. The Whisperer saw the girl Maralyn Andrews lying on the floor. He caught a look in this gentle young woman's brown eyes that convinced him somehow she was blaming herself for what was happening.

The gray, wrinkled face of Phineas T. Hoyle was close beside the girl's brown head.

The Whisperer's voice hissed.

"I'm not talking!" came his eerie whisper. "Now or ever!"

The hand of the masked leader smashed across his mouth. The blood spurted from his cut lips.

"We want that trunk, that's all!" he snarled.

"And then," said The Whisperer, "all of us would be neatly bumped off and dropped into the river! It's a nice idea, but I don't fall for it!"

"You will!" snapped the leader. "Joe, you can do your stuff! I'll bet this guy with the funny voice thinks a lot of that dame."

It suddenly dawned upon The Whisperer that he did care a great deal about the childlike Tiny Traeger. Not as she cared for him; for as Wildcat Gordon, he regarded himself as too hard-boiled and several years too old to think about the child he had always called Tiny.

It was clear to him now that Tiny and the others had come into the hands of the gang in some manner that had not revealed The Whisperer to be Wildcat Gordon. Not knowing of the hunchback's independent action, this was difficult to understand.

But The Whisperer knew these men did not know. For he was looking at the feet of the masked leader. Strangely enough, it was because of those feet he was sure the secret of the police commissioner was still safe.

There was no doubt but this old warehouse was isolated. If his detectives had fallen down on trailing The Whisperer, there was little hope of saving Tiny Traeger or any of them in this building.

"We haven't much of a whip," stated the leader,

unpleasantly, "but I guess one of the boys' belts will do the trick."

The man called Joe stepped close to the white, bared back of Tiny Traeger. The girl twisted her small, round head, and The Whisperer could see her appealing glance. Then he knew she had identified him, but not as Wildcat Gordon.

For Tiny Traeger knew The Whisperer as "Dunk" Smith, a friend who sometimes visited her grandfather. They had devised the name and the idea to prevent the girl from discovering the truth about Wildcat Gordon.

"You'll never get the trunk!" stated The Whisperer. "In fact, that trunk is where I couldn't get it myself!"

CHAPTER XVII
THE WHIP FOR TINY

THE masked leader snarled out an oath.

"Let her have it, Joe! When the blood begins running from that pretty back, maybe it'll make a difference!"

Joe raised the leather belt with its cruel buckle. He let it swish softly through the air. Tiny's curved back shrank from the sound of it.

Maralyn Andrews screamed, "No! No! She doesn't know anything! She doesn't! The Whisperer can tell! Whip him!"

Joe licked his lips.

"All right, chief?" he questioned, gloatingly.

"Ready to spill the truth, Whisperer?" demanded the masked leader.

The Whisperer was listening intently. There was only the lapping of the black water in the hole of the floor. The Whisperer lifted his body slightly. Yes, his chair would come free, though he was bound tightly to it.

The Whisperer moved his head stubbornly. The leader snarled an order. The buckled belt swished into the air above Tiny's softly curving back. The leather hissed viciously.

Then all hell seemed to break loose. A submachine gun sent a smashing stream of slugs through the wall of the room in which Tiny Traeger was about to feel the cut of the lash.

Joe swung around, a bewildered look in his hard eyes, the blood spurting from his throat.

Shouts resounded throughout the old warehouse. From two doors the police were jamming in, their guns ringing the members of the rosebud gang. Sergeant Thorsen, Maloney and Carson were leading the raiders.

One rosebud man went for a gun and died with a burst of bullets that nearly tore out his ribs.

Though bound tightly to the wooden chair, The Whisperer's feet were free.

The police trap had been sprung. His own men were smashing in. But the saving of Tiny Traeger and the others, including himself, meant sheer disaster for Commissioner Wildcat Gordon.

DIRECTLY under the police guns, The Whisperer reared to his feet. Wooden chair and all, he lunged forward. The masked leader of the rosebud gang was directly between him and the black hole dropping to the river.

The masked leader, his hands in the air, could not move fast enough. The steel-muscled weight of The Whisperer struck him squarely. He let out a snarling yell and pitched from his heels down the hole in the floor into the river.

The Whisperer's feet were free and as they went down; he drove the other man underwater. The current whirled them from under the warehouse into the river. Though nearly strangled, The Whisperer got his legs locked around the other man.

They were thus tangled when they came up. The leader of the rosebud gang had lost his mask. With The Whisperer's legs clamped around him, he was swimming desperately. The Whisperer was gulping in water, but he maintained that scissors grip.

From back of the warehouse, shots could be heard. The shouting police were rounding up the gang. Some were running along the shore, watching for the two men who had gone into the water. They had hardly had time to identify one as The Whisperer. The rosebud gang leader got into shallow water under an old wharf. He turned and pulled The Whisperer after him, bringing the wooden chair and all.

"I'm saving you!" he sneered. "Now the trunk's between you and me! They've got the others! We'll split it between us, and that will be that!"

The Whisperer knew then that this man would double-cross his own gang just as he had already double-crossed and caused the murder of another man. For his face had been revealed when his mask fell off.

Now it was dark under the old wharf. The Whisperer had lost his odd dental plates as his head had jammed the other man in the river. A glance from this man would expose him as Wildcat Gordon.

Wildcat now hissed in a whispering voice, "Maybe we can make a deal, the two of us! There are millions in that trunk! Get these cords off of me."

The other man bent close and said, "I'll get them off when I know where the—"

He stopped speaking abruptly. He was close enough now to identify the square jaw, the hard Texas eyes of Wildcat Gordon.

"So that's who—"

The rosebud gang leader started to speak. He never finished. Wildcat Gordon's hard head jammed

forward and snapped upward. His skull cracked squarely upon the chin of the other man.

The man squawked, sank and gurgled as dirty river water poured into his throat. Wildcat now discovered his strenuous efforts had worked one arm loose. One hand caught the throat of the other man ruthlessly.

"It's less important that you go to the chair than that you never squawk about what you know!" he grated.

His fingers locked in the other man's hair. He shoved his head under and held it. As he did, he was thinking of murdered watchmen, of stilettos through men's hearts, but most of all the whipping that Tiny Traeger had narrowly escaped.

THE WHISPERER, or Wildcat Gordon, waded alone from the river. He had a roadster parked not far away in this district. It contained replacements for his river-soaked attire.

The police squads were herding the rosebud gang into their cars. They were caring for Tiny Traeger and Maralyn Andrews. The partly conscious Phineas T. Hoyle was put into a squad car, with handcuffs on his wrists.

Deputy Henry Bolton was on the scene. He had been tipped off to the raid at the last minute. He had seen Phineas T. Hoyle.

"Put double handcuffs on him!" yelled Deputy Bolton. "It's all a stall, him being knocked out! At last, boys, we've got The Whisperer!"

The wooden-laced Sergeant Thorsen said nothing. He had carried out Wildcat Gordon's orders. Deputy Bolton was his superior. Perhaps this Phineas T. Hoyle was The Whisperer. Maloney and Carson had trailed The Whisperer to this gang retreat.

As the squad cars were pulling away from the old warehouse, a siren screamed, coming from uptown. A roadster rocketed into the deserted street.

From this roadster stepped Wildcat Gordon, immaculately clad in a loud green suit. His red necktie was new and his carnation glowed in his coat lapel. His army hat was cocked jauntily over one Texas eye.

Deputy Henry Bolton was gloating over this raid, over the capture of Phineas T. Hoyle, though he had not the slightest idea what orders had sent the reserve squad cars down upon the rosebud gang.

"I said I'd get The Whisperer and there he is!" said Bolton, screwing up his round mouth into a self-satisfied smirk. "The major has been looking for you again tonight, Commissioner Gordon."

Henry Bolton's tone indicated he regarded himself as good as in the commissioner's chair.

Wildcat Gordon wore a hard grin. He flicked a petal of his carnation in Deputy Bolton's direction.

"Sergeant Thorsen," he said, quietly, "you will remove those handcuffs from Phineas T. Hoyle. I don't want any suit for false arrest on our hands."

Deputy Bolton came close to choking.

He yelled, "But that Hoyle and this girl, Maralyn Andrews, have got to be booked, anyway, for the murder of Lannis Jacklin right under your nose, Gordon!"

"Take off the handcuffs, Henry!" snapped Wildcat. "Here comes Mayor Van Royston, and you wouldn't want to make a mistake with his honor looking on!"

CHAPTER XVIII
THE WHISPERER'S REVENGE

"WHAT'S all this? What's all this?" spouted Mayor Van Royston, bustling into the warehouse.

"That's what I want to know," rasped Henry Bolton. "I have all the evidence that this Phineas T. Hoyle was The Whisperer! Lannis Jacklin was knifed by this girl, who visited him!"

Maralyn Andrews gasped, "I never visited Lannis Jacklin! It was—"

Wildcat interrupted mildly, "Never mind it, Miss Andrews. I know you did not visit Jacklin. I have been informed in the past few minutes that there is a brass-bound trunk sent to my office containing a fortune that once belonged to your father, Burton Sedrick Andrews, the prisoner over there, as well as the private fortune of Lannis Jacklin in his life of crime."

Henry Bolton's eyes popped. The grayish-bearded hunchback with the brown mole under his left eye was pushed forward. He stared at Wildcat Gordon.

"You were known as John Smith?" stated Wildcat.

The hunchback nodded, but his eyes gleamed.

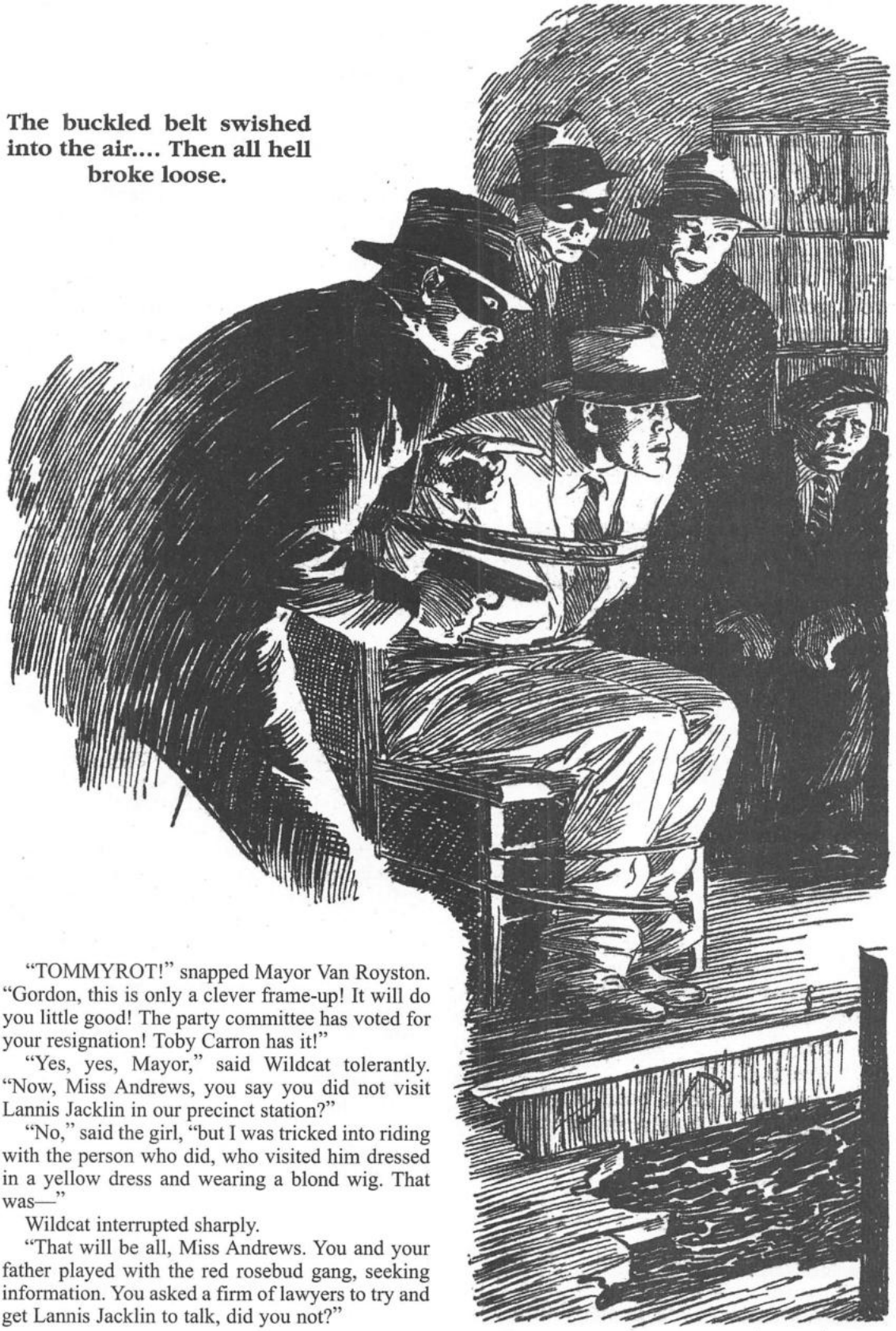
"But you are Burton Sedrick Andrews, and several millions in bonds and jewels in a brass-bound trunk belong to you and your daughter, Maralyn?"

"Correct!" said the hunchback. "It was stolen by a partner of Phineas T. Hoyle, and money from my estate was used to build up a gang, known as the red rosebuds to you and the police. That partner was Lannis Jacklin, who spent fifteen years in prison."

"They hid a map under brown moles like that one on your face?" suggested Wildcat. "Did you have the location of the key to this trunk under the mole on your face?"

The hunchback smiled.

"The mole on my face is genuine, Commissioner. It was in my head where the island of the key was located. But I did not know where on the island, for that was on the torn map. I own the island and it was our old home."



The buckled belt swished into the air.... Then all hell broke loose.

"TOMMYROT!" snapped Mayor Van Royston. "Gordon, this is only a clever frame-up! It will do you little good! The party committee has voted for your resignation! Toby Carron has it!"

"Yes, yes, Mayor," said Wildcat tolerantly. "Now, Miss Andrews, you say you did not visit Lannis Jacklin in our precinct station?"

"No," said the girl, "but I was tricked into riding with the person who did, who visited him dressed in a yellow dress and wearing a blond wig. That was—"

Wildcat interrupted sharply.

"That will be all, Miss Andrews. You and your father played with the red rosebud gang, seeking information. You asked a firm of lawyers to try and get Lannis Jacklin to talk, did you not?"

"Yes," said the girl. "That was how Attorney Mudge must have lost his life. That is how—"

"Where's all this getting us, Gordon?" said Mayor Van Royston. "This is a musty place and I don't like it! Why not take these prisoners to headquarters?"

"Have patience, Mayor," stated Wildcat. "There may be another exhibit. I wouldn't want to rush over to meet Toby Carron with my resignation."

"I still say Phineas T. Hoyle was The Whisperer!" insisted Deputy Bolton, stubbornly.

"No! No!" cried Burton Sedrick Andrews. "For I was trapped and knocked out by The Whisperer! At that time he had the trunk! At the same time, Phineas T. Hoyle was in the hands of this gang!"

"That's right," said Wildcat, quietly. "Lannis Jacklin ruined Phineas T. Hoyle by looting your estate, Andrews. Hoyle was determined to make restitution. The red rosebud gang was out to get the millions Lannis Jacklin had hidden. Martin Mudge, Phineas T. Hoyle, Maralyn Andrews and her father are innocent of the killing of Jacklin. The murderer was a female impersonator, with very small feet."

Mayor Van Royston was raging, unconvinced.

"What the devil are you talking about, Gordon?"

"Come along, mayor, and Henry, and some of the boys," directed Wildcat.

HE led the way to the old wharf where the tidal mud stretched at its shore end. A body that had been dapper lay there. Before the others could speak, Wildcat said, "You will notice that Toby Carron had small feet, Mayor."

"How did this happen—how did he get here?" gasped Mayor Van Royston.

"That I can't say positively, only I had information the leader of this red rosebud mob would be found here, very dead. Your good friend Toby, the girl in the blond wig who stuck the knife in Lannis Jacklin's heart. Who had his own partner, Mudge, killed after Mudge had tried to remove Toby's fingerprints and steal half the treasure map off Jacklin.

"Too bad Toby Carron had to get himself rubbed out when he was carrying around an order for my resignation, Mayor. That order must be very, very wet."

Burton Sedrick Andrews was staring at Wildcat Gordon. So was his daughter, Maralyn.

"Though The Whisperer nearly put me out of business, he seems to be a great fellow," said the hunchback.

Whatever the father and daughter may have suspected, it was not mentioned then or ever afterward.

THE END

INTERLUDE by Will Murray

This intriguing volume rings down the curtain on the first series of Street & Smith's *Whisperer Magazine*. Launched in the Fall of 1936, *The Whisperer* ran slightly over a year before falling victim to a wave of magazine cancellations triggered the following Autumn by the so-called Roosevelt Recession. Street & Smith axed a flock of titles that had been doing reasonably well. It was a huge disappointment for the venerable firm, which had cancelled *Pete Rice* and *Nick Carter Magazine* to make room on their schedule for *The Whisperer* and its companion title, *The Skipper*.

The two stories we held back for this concluding volume are as different as night and day. Our first selection, which writer Laurence Donovan submitted as "Red Murder Roses," is, we frankly feel, one of the weaker entries in the series. It was only the second Whisperer novel, and everyone involved was no doubt feeling his way forward, creating a character composed of famous New York police commissioners of the past such as future U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt and Depression matinee idol James Cagney, whose sharp, slangy, staccato speech and casually insolent mannerisms served as the template for Wildcat's characterization. But some of the story elements: the rose-festooned slayings, numerous queer and creepy characters, and especially the concept of pieces of a missing map being hidden in the false moles of certain individuals smacks of old-style dime novel melodrama.

Since Street & Smith hero novels often came out of story conferences, it may well be that the powers at S&S fed Donovan an old Nick Carter plot from the previous century!

The issue's cover, likewise, seems less than ideal since it offers a helpless Whisperer chin-deep in river water and about to be rescued by a woman! Well, perhaps Street & Smith wanted something different than the usual derring-do that marked most pulp heroes. Perhaps they went too far with this one, breaking so many comfortable pulp conventions.

For the record, Laurence Donovan submitted *The Death Roses* in May of 1936. It was paid for on the 29th—only 15 days after S&S vouchered him for *The Dead Who Talked*, the inaugural Whisperer story.

In this hard-hitting novel, Judge Patrick Kyley is first introduced. He was a recurring character all through this first series, although sadly dropping out

Laurence Donovan

John L. Nanovic

with its conclusion, as did several other members of the familiar cast. Although the Whisperer series continued for five additional years, the original cast of characters who dominated that first run of stories was whittled down to a very few in subsequent incarnations. Gone forever would be combative Mayor Van Royston, loyal Detective Sergeant Tom Thorsen, and Wildcat's faithful dog, Brian Boru. They would never be mentioned again.

That The Whisperer was aimed at a different audience than those who read *The Shadow* is displayed by Paul Orban's evocative interior art, which includes a gripping scene of a female cast member being whipped by thugs. Nothing so brazen would ever have been depicted in the grim pages of *The Shadow!*

An unusual element of *The Death Roses* is the peculiar romantic interest which is explored, things always absent from The Shadow or Doc Savage. It seems to have been a controversial element in the series.

Wildcat Gordon's "relationship" with Miriam "Tiny" Traeger is pretty mild stuff by 21st century standards. The fact that they technically live together is made inoffensive by the chaperoning presence of her grandfather, Richard "Quick Trigger" Traeger, and Wildcat is of course oblivious to Tiny's amorous interest in him.

When, after a three-year hiatus, Street & Smith revived *The Whisperer* magazine in 1940, that relationship was virtually unchanged. Still, as John Nanovic reported in one later editorial, some readers disapproved:

> First, a few readers object to the love interest between Wildcat Gordon, otherwise The Whisperer, and Tiny Traeger. Actually, the stories haven't much love in them, except for the implication that these two are "that way" about each other without admitting it. It does add a little human touch to characters who otherwise might not sound real. What should we do? Do most of our readers really want these stories without any love element, or shall we keep it in? The more replies we get to this query, the better will we be able to judge just what to do about it.

Nanovic ultimately instituted no changes, so the majority of readers must not have complained. One wonders if this was also an issue with the first series.

Our second selection, *Murder Brotherhood*, comes from late in the series and is a much stronger story. Donovan originally titled it, "The Dead Man Lives." It was written in May of 1937 and published in the second-to-last issue of *The Whisperer*—dated November, 1937—exactly a year after the publication of *The Death Roses*. In a year, Donovan had developed the series substantially—and it shows in the marked contrast between these two novels.

As a kind of emulation of The Shadow, The Whisperer series covered similar thriller story territory. Stories set in New York's Chinatown were a *Shadow Magazine* staple from the beginning. In *The Whisperer*, China Hill was the name of an exotic Asian quarter, even though the exact city in which it stood was never named.

With its torture-themed cover, this issue reveals itself as Street & Smith's bold attempt to reach out to readers of Popular Publications' *The Spider*. John Newton Howitt was the cover artist on *The Spider*, and most of *The Whisperer* covers for Street & Smith. This particular illustration was as sordid and nerve-rackingly salacious as any *Spider* cover Howitt ever painted. And that's saying something!

This is Donovan's second Whisperer story set on China Hill. The first was the brutal Tong war terrorfest, *The Red Hatchets*. *Murder Brotherhood* was equally brutal, with its vicious, scheming "Celestials," sinister opium dens, and criminal crosscurrents.

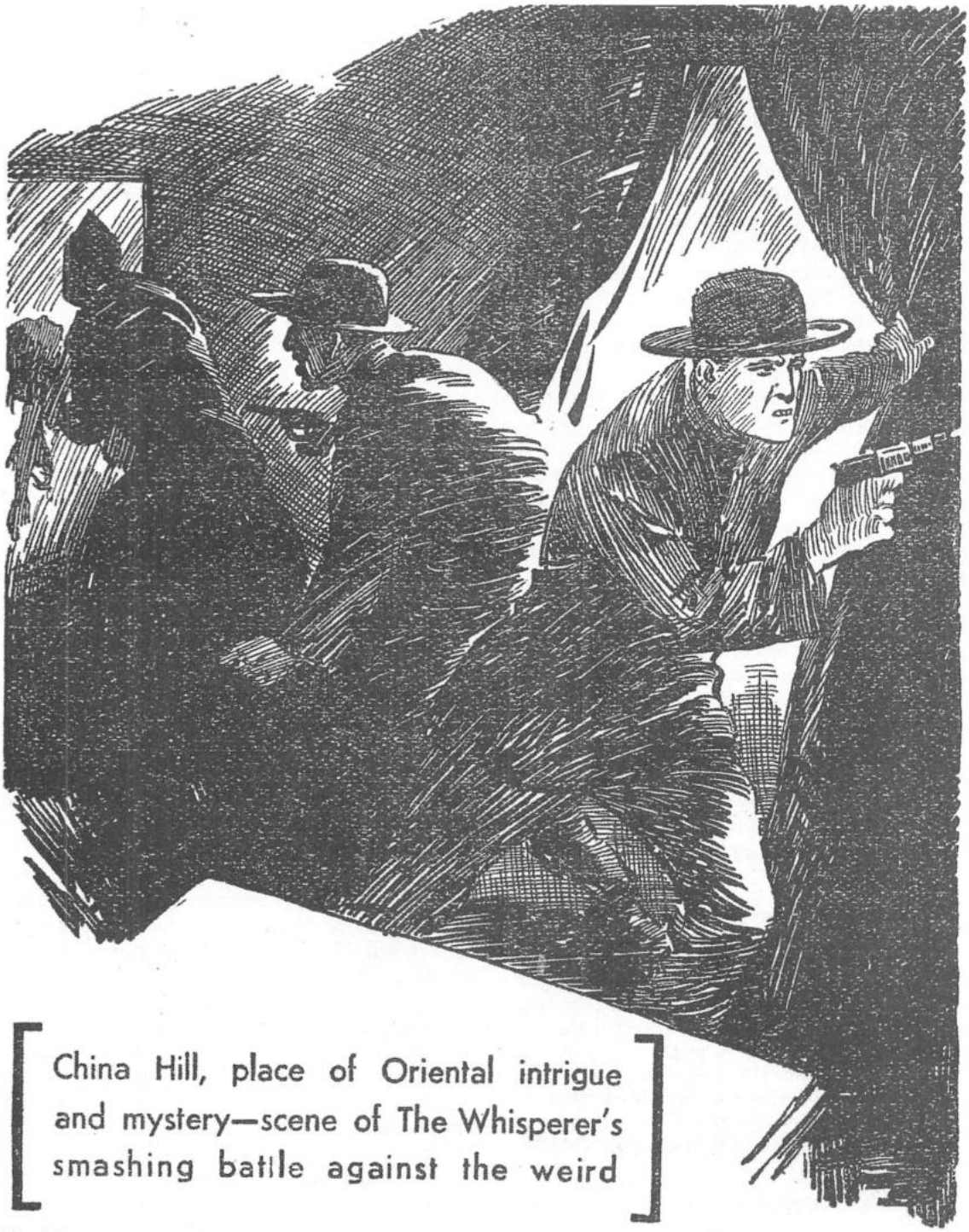
This novel introduces Hong See, the unofficial Mayor of China Hill. Obviously modeled after recurring Shadow cast character Yat Soon, the arbiter of Chinatown and an ally of the Dark Avenger, Hong See managed to return in future Whisperer stories, after the character migrated over to *The Shadow Magazine*.

When the Whisperer first popped up in the back pages of *The Shadow*, Laurence Donovan followed with him. But he penned only two stories, preferring for some unknown reason to concentrate on the Skipper shorts which had begun running in the back of *Doc Savage Magazine* after *The Skipper* was suspended in the same wholesale title purge that felled *The Whisperer*. Newspaperman Alan Hathway quickly jumped into the gap and took over the series, which he did single-handedly all the way through the character's three-year *Shadow* interlude until Street & Smith felt bold enough to attempt to revive him once more on a larger scale.

Because it serves as a sort of sequel to *Murder Brotherhood*, we are reprinting *Afraid to Die*, Hathway's very first Whisperer effort, in which Hong See makes his second appearance.

Afraid to Die originally appeared in the January 1, 1938 issue of *The Shadow*. It is a foretaste of the new era of the character's crimefighting career. Between short stories and a new round of novels, Alan Hathway would ultimately write more Whisperer tales than the originating "Clifford Goodrich," Laurence Donovan.

Now, say goodbye to the last of the original Whisperer novels as chronicled by Laurence Donovan. One novel, *The Crime Prophet*, was orphaned by the magazine's cancellation, but it was never published as a Whisperer tale. •



China Hill, place of Oriental intrigue and mystery—scene of The Whisperer's smashing battle against the weird

Murder Brotherhood

CHAPTER I
HALF-MOONS OF DEATH

HIS face was as gray as the thin silk robe wrapped about him. His eyes were almost closed, showing narrow slits. These were a little brighter, but of the same color as his gray-skinned face. His chin was long and oddly pointed. A mass of hair that nearly coveted his ears had a whitish appearance.

A small pill, looking like black rubber, had been mixed and lighted. Smoke curled from the long-stemmed, ornately carved Chinese pipe. The stem

An unusual, pulse-stirring novel

By CLIFFORD GOODRICH

of the pipe was lying lax in one hand of the gray-clad man. He might have been the same as others in a series of curtained booths extending along what was obviously an underground passage.

The others, both men and women, were asleep, dreaming in the booths of the opium den of Ah Sun. Their little pills of the drug had been mixed, burned, smoked and expired. But the dreams of the addicts in Ah Sun's evil den would remain for some time.

The man who was so gray in his gray silk robe, wrapped around clothes of the same hue, was not dreaming. He had passed through all the pretense of smoking the drug, but none of the fumes of delirium had penetrated to his brain. He was keenly, acutely awake, listening.

For the gray man was the one known on China Hill, in Paradise Street, and throughout the underworld of the city as The Whisperer.

Yet he was not openly known to Ah Sun or any of the others of China Hill or the underworld as the mysterious figure whose voice had become a whispering menace. Ah Sun knew him only as "D.

Smith," a quiet, humble man who came occasionally to his Den of Dreams, took his single pipe, and departed.

Soft-footed attendants shuffled between the booths. One yellow-faced Oriental glanced at The Whisperer and moved on without emotion. To the Chinese this quiet, gray man was like the others: his brain drugged, and his dreams causing him to forget all this sordid, evil place to which he had come to find them.

But as the attendant went by, The Whisperer's slitted eyes opened a little wider. There had been the sweet, sickening odor of incense in Ah Sun's place. This had mingled with the cloying smell of the opium pills as they were cooked for the smokers.

Now there was something else. Another odor. A burning of something different from the incense and the drugs in which Ah Sun traded. It was like the smell of flesh suddenly burned. It seemed to come from a closed door at the end of the corridor containing the opium booths. This door was four curtained booths away from that in which lay The Whisperer.

There might have been a cry of pain, or the sharp voice may have been only that of some opium smoker's utterance in a dream. Yet it sounded as if some person had been hurt, then had stifled a groan.

The Whisperer turned his head, watching that door nearby. The panel of the door was covered by a velvet drapery, and it may have been that the door itself was partly open.

The Chinese attendant had passed on. The Whisperer softly slid his feet to the floor. He was aware of the mumbling, nightmarish words of several other patrons of the place. The one attendant had his broad back turned.

THE WHISPERER started walking, as if still half asleep. He had nearly reached the drapery over the hidden door when he heard the Chinese exclaim suddenly behind him. The Whisperer stopped walking. He groped drunkenly. Then he clutched at a curtain, as if feeling his way uncertainly.

It would mean almost certain death to have it discovered he was feigning the influence of the drug. The Whisperer wanted much to know what was transpiring behind that concealed door, but he was aware there were those in the mysterious room who would permit none to leave the place alive if he was suspected of spying.

The Chinese attendant trapped The Whisperer's arm. The Whisperer turned, groping, muttering.

"I saw a beautiful bird flying there," murmured The Whisperer huskily. "It had many colors."

The impassive attendant muttered and conducted him back toward his booth. That odor of burned flesh was coming stronger now, though there were no more cries. The Whisperer permitted himself to be pushed gently back onto the couch where he had been lying. The attendant began cooking another pill.

Because everything depended upon his maintaining his identity as Ah Sun's patron, The Whisperer fumbled the pipe stem to his lips. But he carefully avoided permitting any of the brain-fogging drug from being inhaled.

In all his long career as a crook, the humble, gray man had never been forced under the influence of any drug, except at times when he had been in the hands of enemies and unable to resist.

His nerves and muscles were tense, though they did not appear to be. For he had followed two men into Ah Sun's den under China Hill. He had known that they were meeting others there, but he had been unable to learn who these others might be.

One of the men he had seen was not himself a leader of crooks, but he had long been known as the right-hand man to the great city's most dangerous and most elusive character. This lieutenant of a crime general was known as "Deuce" Dimon. This was no more his name than a dozen others he had employed from time to time.

Deuce Dimon was a tall, solemn fellow whose face was a mask that never seemed to have been broken by a smile. The Whisperer had been watching when Deuce Dimon reconnoitered Ah Sun's place, then had entered it from a side street.

At about this time, The Whisperer had seen another man known as "Scabro." The small, dark, murderous Scabro had long been a thorn in the side of the police. But the police, even the Federals, had never been able to pin a rap upon the dark Scabro.

It was reported that Scabro's seagoing cruiser was responsible for many aliens being illegally in the United States. Among these, of course, would be Chinese. The Orientals were always good pay and more easily hidden by such of their own nationality as this Ah Sun.

So it was not unusual that Scabro should be visiting Ah Sun's Den of Dreams. Yet there had been still others who had entered, after D. Smith had made his own way in, taken his pipe and waited. But the others had come into that other room through a different door. Their voices had murmured, but The Whisperer had learned nothing.

"Trapped by my own smartness," said The Whisperer softly to himself, as his fumbling attempt to reach the draped door had failed. "Now I've got to lie here like any other dope-head until something comes out of that room."

The Whisperer's comment was called forth by the attitude of the huge attendant. He now had stationed himself close by, watching the gray man. The Whisperer lay quietly, apparently absorbing the drugged smoke. He was in no position to match either wit or strength with Ah Sun's many hench-

men. Better to discover nothing than to lose his standing with the adroit and wise, old Ah Sun.

Incense has its own peculiar, soothing odor, Opium has fumes. Someone must have closed the door behind the drapery, because the sickening smell of seared flesh ceased to permeate the place. Under the eyes of the Chinese attendant, The Whisperer pretended to have passed completely into an opium-inspired dream.

WHEN The Whisperer's keen senses had first been aroused, there were nine men in the hidden room beyond the opium-smoking booths. Eight were seated at a hideously beautiful teakwood table, the legs of which were like claws of dragons.

The eight men were masked by silken hoods that left but gleaming eyes peering out. One of these men could as well have dispensed with his silken mask. For his hands were thin and yellow, and his fingernails were so long and curled as to make his hands virtually useless. The tall, solemn Deuce Dimon, whom The Whisperer had first marked entering the place, could have been picked out by his height.

Deuce Dimon wore a silken mask. He sat close to the queerly hunched figure at the head of the carved table. This man, who seemed to be in command of the strange assembly, had one shoulder hunched high under his right ear. Like most deformed persons, he spoke with a rasping, imperious voice, as if he suspected others were making sport of his infirmity.

"Each of us has committed murder!" he said gratingly. "Each of us has set down the details of that murder or, shall we say, murders? There are seven copies of each confession! It is understood that each of us shall retain all copies signed and marked by the others."

The heads in the silken masks nodded in confirmation.

"They agree, Royal," said the tall Deuce Dimon aloud.

"Silence, Deuce!" snapped the hunchbacked leader. "It has been understood that no names are to be spoken, though we may know each other! Even the walls of the Den of Dreams may have ears!"

The masked Chinaman moved his useless hands in an outward gesture, as if to say there could be no ears in the Den of Dreams, and if there were he—Ah Sun—would see that they were speedily cut off. The Chinese hands again waved, this time toward the one Oriental who was standing near the head of the table.

"Sang Yoy will proceed with the mark of the half-moon," said Ah Sun softly.

"May my ancestors forgive me, but the brand shall be first upon my own flesh. Each of you will guide the hand of Sang Yoy."

This sounded strange, but then it could be seen that the Chinese called San Yoy, whose face was deeply pockmarked, was moving slowly along the edge of the table, guided by the feel of one bloused arm. Where Sang Yoy's eyes should have been were only vacant holes, burned deeply.

Perhaps Sang Yoy at some time had seen too much of Ah Sun's business.

A skinny, shrunken, yellow arm was above the long fingernails of Ah Sun. Sang Yoy reached his master's side. Ah Sun touched his wrist. Sang Yoy was carrying a polished brass brazier of red-hot coals in his one hand. He reached now and pulled out what looked like a silver fork with a glowing, curved end.

"So it shall be written imperishably," said Ah Sun, with dignity, "At this spot below my elbow, Sang Yoy."

Then it was that The Whisperer outside may have caught the first odor of burning flesh mingling with incense. For Sang Yoy pressed the reddened curve of the silver fork upon his master's arm and held it there while Ah Sun pushed his own flesh slowly against the branding instrument.

A SMOKING scar appeared instantly. It was in the form of a pointed half-moon. As the instrument was removed, Ah Sun folded his skinny arms and said calmly, "Thus I become the first of the Half-Moon Brotherhood."

"Great hell!" breathed the masked man next to him. "I wish I had your guts! But come on, Sang Yoy, give me the works!"

The flesh of this man's forearm smoked, and he could not repress a groaning cry. That may have been the cry heard by The Whisperer.

There could be no emotion in Sang Yoy's face, for he had no eyes. It was as if each of the men at the table branded himself with that queer silver fork. That is, each of seven. For the hunchback was the last.

Deuce Dimon extended his own long arm with the sleeve pushed hack.

"It is finished, Sang Yoy," said the hunchback suddenly. "Deuce Dimon is my own man, as you all know. He is not one of us. If he has committed a murder, it never has become known. He has no confession to give. We must stand now all for one, and one for all. It is understood that way?"

The six other men, excepting Deuce Dimon, growled an agreement. The blind Sang Yoy stood with the brazier of red coals swinging on its slender chains. Ah Sun gave a command.

Deuce Dimon was rolling down his sleeve. Of the eight men at the table, he was the only one unmarked by the burning brand of the half-moon, which had been impressed upon the forearm of each.

Sang Yoy had short-fingered hands that were as yellow as old bone. At Ah Sun's command, he dipped the red-hot silver fork from the brazier. He set the brazier down. It was almost as if those blunt hands were of metal. For Sang Yoy twisted the branding fork into a small ball of metal. Then he dropped all this into the coals.

The hunchbacked man had eyes that burned coal-black through his mask. He did not hesitate now to speak his own name, for he said, "I have here these seven papers. One is my own confession and bears my thumbprint, also the burned half-moon. The other six are your confessions. If at any time any of us imagines he is smarter than the others, or becomes too greedy, it is agreed that the others shall see to it that his thumbprinted confession reaches the hands of the police, or—"

The hunchbacked man gave a clacking, hard laugh.

"Or I, Royal Campano, will personally attend to what must be done!"

The masked heads nodded. Perhaps those of this strange Half-Moon Murder Brotherhood were more concerned with the immediate pain of the reddened sears on their forearms than with any future threats of death.

Each man glanced at the written papers. On each was a smudged print of a thumb. On each was a crisp, burned half-moon.

At the command of the hunchbacked man, each affixed his name to six of the papers. These were passed to his companions.

"That is finished," said the hunchbacked "Royal" Campano. "It is understood that all matters shall be reported to me. I have made myself equal with you, but I also have you in my power. We have gathered six sins under the Half-Moons. Let us go. None is ever to come to my place, unless I should so direct."

Deuce Dimon was the first to arise. The blind Sang Yoy obeyed a command from Ah Sun. A draperied wall at the end of the room divided and all but Ah Sun and the blind Sang Yoy passed through. Sang Yoy pulled a silken cord. The carved table dropped from view.

Draperies swayed again, and the walls appeared to contain only the curtained booths of the opium den.

That odor of burned flesh suddenly came more strongly to The Whisperer. He was lying motionless. He thought that perhaps he should have taken a chance and forced his way through the door behind the drapery.

But now that drapery had suddenly parted. The skinny Ah Sun walked through with his long-nailed hands thrust into the sleeves of his silken blouse. Behind him walked Sang Yoy. A brass brazier swung on three chains and sent up a thin, blue smoke from its hot coals.

Ah Sun's slanted eyes glanced at all the sleeping smokers in the booths. He passed The Whisperer, who was lying inert with one foot trailing to the floor. Sang Yoy, though he lacked eyes, moved alertly, perhaps because of long familiarity with the passages of Ah Sun's Den of Dreams.

Ah Sun glanced down at The Whisperer, heard his stertorous breathing and walked on. But The Whisperer's one foot was set, gripping the deep rug on the floor. He had the break at the moment of some opium-crazed woman screaming in her dream.

IT was as if The Whisperer had himself been projected from the couch in the middle of a nightmare. He cried out in an eerie, whispering voice. As he threw himself from the couch, he overturned the opium-cooking stand. Blunt-fingered hands seemed to grip blindly at nothing, but they snatched at the three chains holding the brazier of hot coals.

"They are birds with long tails!" came a penetrating, chilling whisper. "I must have their plumes!"

The Whisperer's eyes were closed, but one hand had plunged into the brazier of burning coals. A twisted bit of silver was searing his skin, but he clung to it, his other hand pursuing elusive, mythical birds.

There was a sharp, stinging pain in the palm of The Whisperer's hand. Ah Sun pivoted, clapped the palms of his hands sharply. The Den of Dreams was immediately filled with raving, screaming smokers, aroused by the commotion. Half a dozen powerful yellow attendants had obeyed Ah Sun's command.

Ah Sun barked out a command in Chinese. The Whisperer flailed out blindly, but attempted to conceal the hot, twisted silver fork he had taken from the brazier. The palm of his hand stung, and

powerful, resistless fingers suddenly bent his wrist backward.

The Whisperer caught the flash of a knife. He released all hold upon the twisted silver fork and fell back limply upon the edge of his couch. He could detect Ah Sun's shrewd, piercing eyes upon him.

The Whisperer blinked his own nearly colorless eyes slowly open. He glanced up at the attendants towering over him. He spoke dumbly, huskily.

The Whisperer's eyes were closed, but one hand had plunged into the brazier of burning coals. He cried out in an eerie, whispering voice.

"There were the bright birds—"

He seemed to bring himself more fully awake. Other attendants were subduing smokers who had been aroused.

"My humble apologies, Ah Sun," said The Whisperer. "I should never have breathed the second smoke of the gods."

If Ah Sun suspected anything, his half-veiled eyes gave no sign.

"My friend, the Smith, must not take too seriously those creatures of what are only passing glimpses of many heavens," he said slowly. "I am unworthy that the Smith should speak of having offended. You have enjoyed the smoke of the gods. That is enough."

The Whisperer bowed. It was no time to speak further. He removed the gray silk robe. Though his right hand was burned, he betrayed no evidence of it. But he noted that Sang Yoy, the blind Chinese, had swiftly caught up the heated brazier and with it the twisted silver fork.

The Whisperer would have liked a glimpse into the inner room, but he was sure now there would be no one there.

He walked calmly out with Ah Sun, and in a few minutes was moving silently through the midnight of Paradise Street.

He was many blocks away before he removed his burned hand from his pocket, for he had known that half a dozen of Ah Sun's scuttling Orientals had been keeping him in sight. Then under a light, The Whisperer glanced at his hand. There was an angry, red half-moon burned into his palm.

CHAPTER II
THE FEAR OF CAMPO

THE driver of the taxicab was a red-faced, fat Irishman. A gray man with a quaint, round-brimmed hat hailed him at a corner. The taxi driver was cruising on China Hill. At this hour, after midnight, there were always odd fares to be picked up. They were good business, too, for those who left China Hill after midnight were generous with their tips.

The taxi driver glanced at the oddly pointed chin, the blurred grayish-white hair of the gray man. The light showed that the man's eyes were almost colorless.

The driver opened the door quickly and said, "Let's get goin', buddy! I seen a couple of Chinks followin' you around the corner!"

The Whisperer nodded and gave an address in a low voice. The address was two miles downtown. The taxicab swerved at the first corner, and the driver made sure after he had covered a few blocks that the Chinese he had seen had not taken to another car.

"Maybe they thought you was holdin' somethin', mister," the driver called back to his fare. "It's worth somethin' extry to be gittin' you outta jam in this—"

The red face had come around. The driver's eyes bulged. He reached back and flicked on an inside light. His taxicab was empty. The green corner of a bill stuck in the lever of the meter.

"Holy saints!" muttered the driver. "I'm gittin' offa the Hill—"

THE gray man had vanished as easily as a ghost. The taxicab had not stopped anywhere, for there were no signal lights. The bill was ten dollars. The red-faced driver speeded up. He was through with China Hill for tonight, perhaps for many nights.

The Whisperer had stayed in the taxi for but five blocks. He went out the door and vanished in the mouth of an alley. A closed coupé was parked near a high fence. When The Whisperer touched the door, there was a snarling whine. But a red tongue licked his hand between gleaming fangs when he got inside.

The snarling animal was a dog as black as midnight, a Scottish terrier. The Whisperer spoke to the dog as if he were indeed human.

"Brian Boru!" he commanded. "Go!"

But three words. The dog's eyes were as black as his coat, but they glowed at The Whisperer. Once more his red tongue licked the nearest hand. Brian Boru scuttled from the coupé and vanished. Whether The Whisperer needed him again in hours or in days, the Scottish terrier would be waiting.

Brian Boru was a remarkable animal. His scent was keen, but it was the peculiar, weird whisper of his master that controlled him. That same whispering voice had this same effect upon other animals.

As the terrier merged with the darkness of the alley, The Whisperer was reaching into pockets of the coupé. His round-brimmed hat disappeared. A quick movement and the powdery white hair became a reddish hue. One hand went to his mouth, and The Whisperer's oddly pointed chin vanished. That chin became as square and as hard as a chip of granite.

In another minute, even the gray clothes had become a loudly checked suit.

Gray spats were replaced by a pair of vivid yellow shoes. Then there was a bright, fresh carnation in the coat lapel and a necktie that matched it in redness.

The coupé wheeled from the alley. The Whisperer now was wearing a slouched army hat cocked over one of his colorless eyes. Eyes that were neither gray nor blue, but washed out by sun and wind. For generations, the same eyes have been known as Texas eyes.

For The Whisperer, the man at the wheel, was none other than James "Wildcat" Gordon, commissioner of police. That square chin was a token of army training. His whole face had been transformed when he had touched his mouth. All he had done was to remove a queerly shaped dental plate.

The dental plate was the work of a man who had become an expert in disguises. He was Dick Traeger, a retired deputy commissioner of police, but better known as "Quick Trigger."

For years, Quick Trigger had been the same as a father to Wildcat Gordon. First, he had watched his career as an army officer. Later, he had seen him rise from the role of a police inspector to that of commissioner.

And as police commissioner, Wildcat Gordon was a hard man, feared and hated. For he had carried into the great city's department a rigid army discipline and the rule of "get your crook, before he gets you." There was but one widely feared, mysterious criminal that Wildcat Gordon's police had never been able to catch up with.

And he was The Whisperer himself. Only one man in all the city knew positively that Wildcat Gordon was The Whisperer. And that was old Quick Trigger.

LESS than an hour after he had been in Ah Sun's Den of Dreams, Wildcat Gordon ascended an individual elevator set in a thick concrete column. He stepped into the hallway of a penthouse on top of a riverfront loft building. Though it was well after midnight, the aroma of good coffee came from the direction of the kitchen.

A doll-like girl with black curls and oddly bright, blue eyes appeared in the kitchen door and said, "Well, it's about time! You haven't been at headquarters either, for Mayor Van Royston has been calling!"

Wildcat grinned broadly and chucked her under the chin

"Little girls hear too much," he said. "Suppose you go to bed when other children are tucked away?"

The girl sniffed scornfully. She was "Tiny" Traeger, granddaughter of old Quick Trigger. She was twenty odd. But Wildcat Gordon never had regarded her as more than a child. Only old Quick Trigger and Tiny herself knew that she had been wildly in love with Wildcat Gordon for a long time. Perhaps someday he would find it out.

When Tiny left the kitchen, Wildcat Gordon sat down across from old Quick Trigger. The retired deputy was bald, except for two gray tufts of hair over his ears. He seemed to be nearsighted, but he could see a lot farther into most things than many younger men.

Wildcat slowly drank a cup of coffee. Quick Trigger eyed him with suspicion.

"You know why Mayor Van Royston has been callin', Wildcat?" he said.

"Hellamighty, yes!" said Wildcat. "Some more of his big bug friends have lost their shirts! What is it this time, Quick Trigger? Blackmail? Another bunch of dope? Somebody lose their rocks? Someone squawking—"

"Dang it, Wildcat!" complained Quick Trigger. "We've had nearly six months of it! Extortion! Dope-runnin'! Chinese smuggled in! Contracts held up by rackets, an' we ain't been gettin' to first base on any of it! Van Royston's got a yell comin'! This time, headquarters tells me it's that farmer friend of his up close to the line. You know, Chalmers. Well, he tried to drain his land an' didn't pay up, so they found the—"

"One of his men under the rocks in a creek somewhere," supplied Wildcat.

"How'd you know that—"

"Deuce Dimon—Royal Campano!" snapped Wildcat. "Perhaps Ah Sun of Paradise Street! Maybe Scabro, who brings in his hatchet men! Anyway, I dreamed myself into touching distance of some of it tonight, and then—"

Old Quick Trigger fidgeted nervously.

"You been usin' that danged dental plate again, Wildcat? About the time things quiet down an' The Whisperer is being forgotten—"

"Then The Whisperer goes out and gets himself burned," supplied Wildcat. "What would you make of that?"

Wildcat extended his right hand. The red, angry crescent of a half-moon appeared on the skin of his palm.

"Where'd you get it?" demanded Quick Trigger. "If Royal Campano an' his crowd of killers ever get the finger on you—"

"Got it chasing little birdies, Quick Trigger," grinned Wildcat. "I'll make you a prediction: We've had six months of the smartest crime we've ever seen. Unless I choke something out of Ah Sun in Paradise Street, these organized crooks haven't really got started."

"You been in Ah Sun's dump, Wildcat?"

"Hittin' the pipe," said Wildcat calmly. "And I guess that's about all. Now Mayor Van Royston will be standing on one ear for a few weeks until I can get to the bottom of a red-hot silver moon. I happen to know that Royal Campano's ace, Deuce Dimon, was in Ah Sun's tonight. So while his honor is throwing fits, I'm going out looking for half-moons."

Old Quick Trigger shook his head.

"You're crazy, Wildcat" he said sadly. "That means you're holin' up in one of your Whisperer hideouts right when the mayor is yellin' to the newspaper boys about how badly he needs a commissioner."

Wildcat nodded and took another cup of coffee. For more than a year, Mayor Van Royston had violently opposed the methods of Wildcat Gordon. His commissioner had been appointed over his head.

Wildcat's first move in the department had been to weed out graft, put some first-class dicks out in the sticks and elevate a few men who had seen army service and who were not afraid of either hell or high water.

AT the moment Wildcat Gordon was mapping out a campaign against the crime wave—which he was sure had its backing among friends of old Ah Sun—he was getting an unexpected break. It was true that this same day a farmer neighbor of Mayor Van Royston had complained about a contract extortion holdup and a murder on his place.

Wildcat Gordon was fully aware that the mayor's farm and that of Arthur Chalmers were over the line, outside his jurisdiction, but try and put this over with Mayor Van Royston. Wildcat nursed his burned hand and planned a visit to the Chalmers farm the next day.

No more than two or three hours had passed since the mysterious branding of the Half-Moon Murder Brotherhood in Ah Sun's Den of Dreams. The deformed, hunchbacked Royal Campano came into his luxurious penthouse apartment carrying a handful of letters taken from a box downstairs.

Campano walked with a curious, scuttling motion, sidewise. The hump on his back and the twist to his right shoulder comprised an infirmity of which he was extremely sensitive. Even in his own penthouse, he seldom had visitors, and Deuce Dimon was his sole companion.

Deuce was a tall, gangling man. Like Campano's, his hair was long and black. Deuce's eyes were set in deep, bony sockets. They burned sometimes with a smoldering light. Deuce had a habit of looking fixedly at one object for many minutes at a time.

There had been times when lesser racketeers had come up to interview Royal Campano with fixed ideas of their own, only to discover these were inexplicably changed after perhaps an hour of sitting under the stare of Deuce Dimon. These mobsters would have been amazed to know that Deuce Dimon once had passed years in India. The swarthiness of his bony face was not altogether Caucasian.

Perhaps Deuce Dimon could not convert a stick into a snake or cause a boy to climb a rope suspended from thin air, but he could and did make his visitors feel uncomfortable. One man his hypnotic powers had never been able to affect was Royal Campano himself.

But tonight, as they entered the penthouse, Campano had torn open a letter and read it hastily. The writing was fine, that of a woman. Deuce Dimon would have been amazed to hear what Campano said to himself only a few moments later.

Campano rubbed the burned half-moon on his left arm and said, "damnation; and it had to happen tonight! If she had only written yesterday! And I thought the big payoff might be a year away! Well—"

Campano, except for his hunched back and twisted shoulder, was a big man. He came from his own bedroom back into the library of his penthouse. The letter he had been reading now was torn into fine bits and washed down a drain.

Deuce Dimon was sitting, staring at the gas fire in the grate. His deep, dark eyes burned. They seemed to read Royal Campano all the way through.

"Everything's shaped for a cleanup now, boss," said Deuce Dimon. "You have all the big ones, and if anyone else horns in—"

Campano crossed the library. He touched a floor button and a big flat-topped desk moved as if floating in oil. He worked a combination and a door of armored steel opened. There were several rows of small boxes in this cleverly concealed floor safe.

CAMPANO opened several of these boxes. Deuce Dimon apparently did not notice that Campano placed several thick packets of bonds inside his loose shirt. Then Campano held up the papers carrying the thumb smudges.

"If anything happens to me, Deuce," he said softly, "the first thing you do is get rid of these Half-Moon Brotherhood papers. There's always a couple hundred grand in cash here, and that will take care of you."

Deuce's deep eyes probed the black orbs of his boss.

"What's eatin' you?" he demanded. "Maybe you don't like that Chink tie-up? Me, I know more of their own dope than any of their own ancestors. Hell, boss! I could put the spell on old Ah Sun himself, and he wouldn't know afterward what happened to him!"

Campano laughed nervously and swung the big desk back over the floor safe.

"Figure we're safe enough, lettin' the rest of the big shots pull the rackets and takin' our split without doin' more than the brain work, eh, Deuce?"

"Well, why not?" said Deuce Dimon. "I gathered up these murder raps on all of them, and it was only good business to let 'em in on that old bump-off of yours just to make it look good. Hell! They wouldn't use it on you, as long as I'm kickin' around! Forget it, boss."

But Campano's big hands were nervous. He walked over to a tall vase containing a few sprays of roses. He pulled one to bits, scattering the pieces.

"You know, Deuce," he said slowly. "I get queer hunches. I had one in Ah Sun's dump tonight. Perhaps it's that mesmerism junk of yours, but how many were there of us branded with the half-moon?

"You nuts, boss?" grunted Deuce. "Seven, countin' you, of course. You saw that blind Chinaman twist Ah Sun's crazy silver fork and put it in the hot coals as soon as the damn foolishness was over."

Royal Campano nodded and his oily, black hair fell down over his sharp, black eyes. His face was unusual for that of a hunchbacked dwarf who are nearly all one pattern. For his nose was straight, and his chin was big and massive.

"Sure, Deuce, I counted the seven of us," he said. "And I didn't let you have your arm burned, because maybe you'll want to get in the clear and start over again if anythin' happens to me. But just the same, Deuce, I've got a feelin' that eight of us were branded with the half-moon, and that the eighth one doesn't belong."

Deuce Dimon's teeth clicked. He shook his big head.

"Next thing you'll be tellin' me there was somebody else in the room when it happened and—"

"That's just what I am tellin' you, Deuce !" snapped Campano. "Somebody else is marked with the half-moon, and I've got to go out and take care of somethin' tonight! I don't know how it was done, but you've been a swell mug, Deuce, and played along! I'm goin' out alone, and if anythin' happens, you're the only one who has the combination to the floor safe! Burn the Half-Moon Brotherhood papers, take the cash and scram!"

"Listen, Campano!" exploded Deuce. "You're screwy about somethin'! You been threatened on these rackets or somethin'?"

"That's it, Deuce," said Campano softly and suddenly. "There's a mug calls himself Dude Kellow, and he gave me a ring. He's sore on this dope stuff, and I sent him a note tellin' him to lay off, or else—"

Deuce Dimon was swearing to himself when Royal Campano hunched into a big coat and let himself into the elevator.

CHAPTER III
IN THE DEATH CAR

"YOU don't think maybe this guy would be kiddin' me, do you?" said the young fellow whose clothes were too thin for the cold, rainy night. "It seems damn funny he would call me out of bed at four o'clock in the mornin', when he said maybe the job wouldn't be open for maybe another month."

The young fellow shivered and pulled his light coat around his neck. The old man in the filling station said, "Well, Dude, straight jobs is scarce when you've done time. If this fellow has a bunk for you on a boat, you take it."

"Don't think I won't, Dad," said the other. "I'll take anythin' that's honest. Ever since I went up the river a year ago on a job I never pulled, the cops come along and tip off everybody that gives me a chance. This hunchback I met at Dave's place says the cops give him a runaround once, and he'll see that I get a chance for three squares where there'll be no questions asked."

The young man was known as "Dude" Kellow. He lived in a room back of the filling station run by "Dad" Armour. A year before he had taken the "rap" for another boy who had stolen a car and who had a nice sister. That way Dude discovered that once you have a record, good jobs don't come your way; and it is the job of the police to keep an eye on you.

The good-looking hunchbacked man had promised Dude Kellow a job. It seemed the hunchback had learned considerable about Kellow's police record. He had laughed it off.

"Now I'll have a place on a boat, buddy," the hunchback had told him. "The cops don't bother you there. As soon as the job's open, I'll give you a ring."

And at that time the kindly hunchback had loaned Dude Kellow ten dollars and said be would collect it later. This morning, two hours before daylight, the call had come for Kellow. The hunchback said he would pick Kellow up at the filling station.

The high river road passing Dad's filling station was only partly paved. The late night rain was dashing. The gullies were filled with yellow water up to the banks of the road. Dad Armour would have had his filling station closed, if it had not been for Dude Kellow getting that call and waiting for his strange, hunchbacked friend.

THOUGH his clothes were worn and thin, Dude Kellow had on a white shirt, and his face was clean-shaven. He had every appearance of a young fellow who puts up the best possible front.

The phone call had said a car would be along, but neither Kellow nor Dad were prepared for the formidable, long roadster that roared up to the station out of the rain.

A black-eyed man with oily, black hair looked out and smiled. He had a pleasant face.

"Helluva time to rout you out, Kellow!" he greeted. "But the captain of my cruiser wants to make it out of the bay on the mornin' tide! He's got room for one hand, and I wanted to see him, anyway, so I gave you a buzz!"

Old Dad Armour peered closely at the face of the man in the car. The car itself looked more like an armored truck than a private bus. Dad said, "It's

mighty nice of you givin' Dude a chance, mister. He never oughta had that rap up the river, and he's a nice boy!"

"That's fine—fine!" said the car's driver. "Glad somebody has a good word for him! Come along, Kellow!"

The powerful car spewed mud and water as it shot away. Young Kellow sank into the deep soft seat beside the hunchbacked driver. The needle crept up to sixty, then seventy, and the highway was curving. But Kellow had nerve. He was not telling a possible employer how fast he should drive.

Kellow noticed there was a leather suitcase back of the seat. It was old and battered and did not seem in keeping with the car. Suddenly, Kellow had the feeling that the hunchback was driving more like a maniac than a sane man.

The high road followed the hills. In places it was shelved over the river, which was deep and had a strong tidal current. Kellow noticed his friend appeared to be driving with his right hand, the one with that high, twisted shoulder. The powerful roadster skidded around a narrow curve and shot downward.

The hunchback stopped the car abruptly.

"Sprained my left elbow yesterday," he said apologetically. "Mind drivin' for a while? It's only four miles up to the wharf on the bay."

"Sure enough," said Kellow, immensely pleased.

They changed places in the rain. At this point the road narrowed, and for several miles there were only distant farmhouses. Young Kellow had the feeling of being at the wheel of a powerful machine. The car was the best he had ever touched.

Intent upon the highway, Kellow kept the speed down around fifty. His hunchbacked friend did not speak for a while.

Then he said, "Guess I didn't tell you my name is Camp. My cruiser captain is a tough egg, but you'll get along with him. My arm's givin' me the devil."

The hunchback stretched his arm along the seat cushion back of young Kellow. Kellow had not seen the pick, little flick of a knife that the man calling himself Camp had used, then slipped quietly out of the door on his side. That use of the knife had been nervy. For red blood was flowing from the hunchback's wrist.

The scarlet liquid was soaking into the plush, running down onto the seat. The roadster shot along for a mile or more before the hunchback used a thumb to check the bleeding.

Suddenly he said, "It's a tough stretch up ahead, Kellow. I'm always afraid of being held up. Here, you take my gun. I'm not so fast if anythin' happens."

Dude Kellow had a sudden, funny sensation. But when he looked at the hunchback, the man's smile was as pleasant as ever. Kellow accepted the automatic and dropped it into a pocket. Rain sheeted the windshield and compelled him to slow down the car.

The hood of the big roadster pointed down a grade on a slight curve. Kellow was too busy watching the slippery road to catch the sudden, cunning gleam in the hunchback's dark eyes. The man's left hand was down now. It was close to his side, and the blood from the self-inflicted cut had ceased to flow.

The bulge of the automatic pistol was in Kellow's pocket. In that rain the headlights performed a devil's dance and created a gray wall ahead. The hands of Kellow were busy holding the wheel of the car. He leaned forward and peered into the rain.

"That's what they call the Death Jump around that corner, Mr. Camp," said Kellow. "They oughta grade this road more on the inside to keep cars from skiddin' on—"

The hunchback laughed, high and cackling.

"Scared, huh? Well, look out there at that light!"

THERE was no light, but the unexpected words had the effect of turning Kellow's head to the left. The hunchback's twisted right arm snapped around and drove bunched knuckles under Kellow's right ear. The blow snapped the young man's head to one side and his face smashed into the glass of the door.

The hunchback's same high-shoulder arm slapped across Kellow's mouth and his split lips spurted blood.

"What the hell, Mr. Camp—what are—"

The surprised words choked from Kellow's throat. He made a desperate effort to keep the powerful roadster straight, but its nose was shooting out on an overhang of sloping rock at the river side of the highway.

The hunchback's apparently crippled left hand was working now. His fingers gripped the rim of the steering wheel.

Dude Kellow was slumping, attempting to clear his head from the effect of the punch under his ear. That hard right fist socked him again, right on the point of the jaw. The front wheels of the roadster were dipping over the slippery rock to a straight drop of seventy feet or more to the river.

The right-hand door of the roadster snapped open and the hunchback was out, feet barely touching the running board. He made an amazing jump for a man whose upper body was so deformed. None but one who had selected this place long before, known exactly the presence of matted rhododendron bushes near the rock, could have landed so accurately and so safely.

Royal Campano—Mr. Camp—suffered but a few scratches. He was already scrambling back to

the flat rock beside the highway when metal and glass jangled and splintered on the rocks far below. Campano crouched, his ears catching all the death sounds, and then he was swearing softly.

"Caught on the rocks! Hell! That will never do! Perhaps the punk isn't even croaked!"

Campano scuttled down the steep cliff like some vile animal, keen for the scent of a murder he was not sure had been committed. He swore because he carried no flashlight and was compelled to feel his way. Then his oaths became jubilant.

"Damned if it could have been better! Whole side's smacked out, and the punk's laid out cold!"

In the slashing rain, Royal Campano studied the situation for a few seconds. Young Dude Kellow was lying clear of the car on the rocks close to the river's edge. The roadster was split on one side and a door had been ripped loose. That broken side was half submerged in the tidal current of West River.

Campano made sure his gun, with a clip that had two discharged shells, was still in Kellow's pocket. He pulled it out and clasped the young man's clammy fingers around the butt. Next the king racketeer who had that same night before branded six other men into a Half-Moon Brotherhood of murderers, made a thorough job of examining the roadster.

His fingers touched the wet and sticky plush of the seat where his own blood had stained it. The dive of the car could not have been better framed. The tide was ebbing, and the water had not touched that telltale blood mark.

Campano took a crumpled note from his pocket. Before he had left his penthouse, the king racketeer had told Deuce Dimon of a threat, of something he must care for personally.

The hunchback chuckled now, grimly. The note placed in Kellow's pocket was a letter, a little warning which he himself had signed. It did not commit Campano to any crime, but it did warn Dude Kellow he must stay out of the dope racket.

Blood was oozing from what seemed no less than the split bone of Dude Kellow's skull. An ear close to his throat gave no evidence of a heartbeat.

"Even if he does live," murmured Campano, "he could burn a dozen times on the stuff the cops will get. There isn't a detail that—"

Campano straightened in the darkness. He let out a terrible oath.

"And I didn't think of that!"

Like others who have plotted perfect crimes, Campano had overlooked one vital detail: Dad Armour. The old man back there at the filling station. He would know about the telephone call, about Dude Kellow waiting.

Again came Campano's harsh, cackling laugh. His twisting fingers hooked into Dude Kellow's thick, brown hair. He tore out a handful, rolled it into a ball and thrust it into a pocket. Seconds later, he was climbing the cliff with agile movements that entirely belied his twisted deformity. Perhaps like many other cripples, he had superhuman strength in his arms.

DAD ARMOUR had returned to his bed. Though it was close to dawn, it would be late before anyone would be along that rainy highway for a filling of gas or a hamburger sandwich. Dad never kept much money about, and he lived in a three-room shack. One room had been occupied by young Dude Kellow.

Dad Armour may or may not have heard his door creak open. He had not heard a chugging old sedan come up the river road and stop a hundred yards away. Royal Campano was in the car. It had been setting back in the woods not far from where his powerful roadster had plunged over the river bluff.

Campano could hear Dad Armour's snuffling snores. A tire wrench from the filling station was in Campano's hand. Between his fingers and the iron was a greasy rag. There would be no fingerprints.

The tire wrench smashed across the old man's face. One blow and another, until Dad's convulsive writhing and his deep groans had ceased.

Campano dropped the wrench. He could feel Dad Armour's gnarled hands where they had become claws of pain in the darkness. The wad of brown hair came from Campano's pocket. He pulled the strands straight and caught a few across Dad Armour's fingernails.

When the old sedan chugged back along the river road, Campano carried an old gripsack packed with some of Dude Kellow's few belongings. The old cash register was open and a few coins were spilled on the floor. Kellow's own room was in disorder, as if he might have committed the crime on the spur of the moment and departed hastily.

Campano's sedan followed the river road but a short distance, then was turned off into a side highway. This highway was of rough concrete. Campo left the sedan there, after he had carefully buried Dude Kellow's gripsack.

When Royal Campano again came to the river road, it was nearly daylight. He now carried but one object: this was the worn leather suitcase that Kellow had seen in the back of the roadster.

Campano started walking across the fields where a maze of country roads and railroad tracks came into the city from the south. No living person had seen Royal Campano from the time he had stepped out of his penthouse, leaving Deuce Dimon alone.

THE dark-eyed Deuce Dimon had not slept during the remaining hours of the morning. Instead, he had

entered Royal Campano's own room. Campano had carefully disposed of a letter he had torn to bits. But there was a small corner of scented paper which had fluttered to the rug and had been overlooked.

There were but four letters of a word on this scrap and they meant nothing, except that they were in the fine writing of a woman's hand. Deuce went back into the main room. His deep eyes stared for a long time into the fire of the gas grate.

"Two hundred grand," he muttered grimly. "O.K., boss, but six half-moons are worth that much apiece."

CHAPTER IV
A BRAIN GONE STRAIGHT

OLD Doctor Carew was the county medical examiner. Sheriff Callahan, a close friend of Commissioner Wildcat Gordon, was with Doctor Carew when he concluded his examination of the body of Dude Kellow.

"Deader'n a mackerel, sheriff," pronounced Doctor Carew. "You can see for yourself how his head was split on that rock."

Sheriff Callahan walked around and nodded grimly. He had carefully assembled an automatic pistol, a crumpled letter signed by Royal Campano, and a few other objects from Dude Kellow's pockets. The morning was gray, and it was still raining.

The tide had dropped, but it could be seen where Campano's body must have been hurled through the broken door and into the current. Some bodies lost in the tidal current might later be recovered. Some were swept out through the cluttered harbor and vanished at sea.

Still, Sheriff Callahan had half a dozen deputies using drag irons in boats, but without result. Sheriff Callahan had been at the filling station of old Dad Armour. The old man was gruesomely dead.

The sheriff shook his head in puzzlement.

"Damned if I can figure it out, especially how Kellow happened to be with Royal Campano, unless maybe he buzzed him and offered to fix up some kind of a deal on this dope stuff," said Callahan. "Anyway, it's a clean case of this mug robbin' Dad's fillin' station. The way he happened to be with Campano is somethin' else, so—"

Two city police cars had halted at the edge of the bluff.

"So we'll take over the works and give your brain a rest!" came a hard, rasp voice. "Callahan, you never seem to learn the markers of your own county line! It happens that this whole mess is inside the city limits!"

Sheriff Callahan's gaunt face wore a tough grin. The jaunty figure of Wildcat Gordon came striding down the rocks. Wildcat's army hat was cocked over one eye. Old Quick Trigger shuffled behind him. A dozen other coppers were surrounding Campano's smashed car where it lay half in the river.

Old Doctor Carew stood up, stepped back and sighted at the rocks.

"Damme, Sheriff, if he ain't called it on us!" he exclaimed. "The city line ends at that second point of rocks up there! I never thought of that, but I'm danged glad of it!"

Sheriff Callahan made a motion of washing his hands.

"You're welcome to it, Wildcat," he said. "Campano was one of your own rats, and so was this Dude Kellow. Too bad Kellow got it the way he did. I don't mind much about Campano, but Kellow ought to burn slow and easy for what he did to old Dad Armour. Why, Dad Armour helped him when—"

But Wildcat Gordon was not listening. He was bending over the apparently broken body of Dude Kellow. Wildcat rubbed a blunt thumb over a small torn spot on Kellow's scalp, just over his right ear. Then Wildcat put his hand into a pocket and fingered a small, rolled ball of hair.

WILDCAT and Quick Trigger had been among the first of the city cops to examine Dad Armour's body. Sheriff Callahan had been smart enough to leave the brown strands of hair under the murdered man's fingernails. But it had been Wildcat's keen eyes that had seen the minute ball of brown hair lying on the floor.

Wildcat quickly matched the hair with the torn spot on Kellow's scalp, but he said nothing. His own police medical examiner was using a stethoscope over the young man's heart.

"You city fellows never believe what you see," grunted Doctor Carew to Wildcat's doctor. "One look was enough for me. I could have told you he was dead at twenty feet."

Wildcat's medical examiner nodded and grinned. But he stepped to one side and touched Wildcat's arm. He whispered a few words. Wildcat was carefully examining the automatic taken from Kellow's pocket.

"O.K.!" snapped Wildcat. "Callahan, we'll be taking the body along to the city morgue! That'll save your county taxpayers some expense, anyway!"

Wildcat had wrapped the pistol and Campano letter and stuffed them into a pocket. He ordered some of his own coppers to take over the dragging of the river for Campano's body. His fingerprint man and chemist took some impressions from the steering wheel. Wildcat examined the now dried blood matting the plush of the seat.

"You have all the luck, Wildcat," growled Sheriff Callahan. "Open-and-shut case. This Kellow prob-

ably shot Campano up there, and maybe Campano fought long enough to skid the car off the bluff. That's Campano's blood inside, because Kellow was thrown clean out. Open-and-shut case, and we miss out on the credit by it bein' a hundred yards over the city line."

"Yeah!" snapped Wildcat. "Callahan, you're half right! It's an open case, but it's a damned long way from being shut!"

The chemist was cutting out pieces of the plush seat. Wildcat went up the bluff with the agility of a cat. He paused a short time, glancing at the bushes near where the car had skidded over. He grunted profanely when he discovered the rain would have washed out any footprints there might have been. But he picked up a small piece of curved, black glass.

"WILDCAT" GORDON

Wildcat's medical examiner was in the squad car when Dude Kellow's body was carried up the bluff, placed in the rear seat and started toward the city. Sheriff Callahan swore mildly when Wildcat Gordon followed the other car quickly in his own coupé.

It seemed to Sheriff Callahan that Wildcat Gordon was losing his grip. He had left only a few coppers dragging the river, and two on guard at Dad Armour's filling station. He had ordered the old man's body removed to the morgue.

But the coupé and the squad car had not yet reached a populated section when Wildcat shot his coupé alongside the other car. He spoke quickly to the medical examiner.

"There was a young fellow died last night in the emergency," said Wildcat. "He was from downtown, one of the flophouses, and there isn't a chance in a million he will ever be identified. You will issue the usual order and have him placed in the morgue as Dude Kellow. Sergeant Thorsen, give this young fellow a lift back here."

Detective Sergeant Tom Thorsen was a tall, wooden-faced copper. His chin was square and rugged. He seldom smiled. Years before, Sergeant Thorsen had been in the regular army. He was Wildcat Gordon's ace detective. Though Wildcat encountered opposition from Mayor Van Royston and others of the department, a command given to Sergeant Thorsen would have been carried out implicitly if it had been necessary for the wooden-faced sergeant to skate over thin ice across hell.

"I've given him an injection, Commissioner Gordon," said Wildcat's medical examiner. "He's suffering with concussion, and his pulse is low; but he will probably pull through. Old Carew is deaf, and he didn't make a test for breath."

"Right!" said Wildcat. "Sergeant Thorsen, give it out to the newspaper boys that this Kellow was found dead and that Campano's body has been washed away. You can put that filling station murder on Kellow, too! I'll be busy for some time, but have Deputy Bolton make a search of Royal Campano's penthouse and put it under a strong guard! Campano's right-hand man, Deuce Dimon, may be there! I don't want him held!"

THE squad car shot away toward the city. Old Quick Trigger stared at Wildcat Gordon. The grisly body of Dude Kellow had been hastily placed in the rumble seat of their coupé.

"You've got me beat, Wildcat," complained Quick Trigger. "Callahan was right when he said this was a dead open an' shut case. After buttin' your head on that Ah Sun stuff last night, I was hopin' you'd lay off. Look at the break we've got in Royal Campano being rubbed out."

"Hellamighty, Quick Trigger!" exploded Wildcat. "Campano's just about as dead as I am! Perhaps all of that stuff last night was a setup for what we've found this morning! Anyway, I've a half-moon burning the middle of my hand, and when this young fellow starts talking maybe we'll find some more half-moons."

Quick Trigger rubbed a hand across his bald spot.

"I guess I ain't doin' so good," groaned the old man. "Maybe you was really hittin' the pipe at Ah Sun's last night. Anyway, Mayor Van Royston wanted you special this mornin'. This neighbor of his, Chalmers, has been raisin' fourteen kinds of hell over that guy on his drainage job being bumped off because he wouldn't pay up on the regular racket."

Wildcat did not seem to be listening. The coupé went into a series of narrow streets. Wildcat parked it in an alley. None paid any attention when an unconscious young man was lifted from the rumble seat and carried up two flights of a back stairs.

For it was not the loudly garbed Wildcat Gordon who took Dude Kellow from the coupé. A few swift changes, the insertion of the dental plate in his mouth, and it was the humble, inconspicuous D. Smith who stepped from the small car.

The Whisperer! Though in this unquestioning neighborhood none knew the quiet man as the notorious and widely sought figure of the under-

world. With Quick Trigger following, The Whisperer carried Dude Kellow into a nearly barren room and placed him upon a table.

Dude Kellow breathed. In a few minutes, given a stimulant, he was talking. But the concussion had been severe.

"When I get on the boat—look out—we'll go over, Mr. Camp—"

The words burbled. When Kellow's blue eyes opened, they stared vacantly. The Whisperer put him upon a bed.

"You took a ride with Royal Campano?" said The Whisperer.

"We're goin' over—down the wall, Mr. Camp," murmured Kellow vaguely. Old Quick Trigger shook his head.

"If Mayor Van Royston an' Deputy Bolton get wise to you hidin' out this fellow, that will end everythin', Wildcat," he said.

The Whisperer gave a ghostly chuckle, "When we find Royal Campano and the half-moons, perhaps I'll take a day off and look into this drainage racket," said The Whisperer. "But—"

Dude Kellow was talking again, whispering vaguely.

"I want to go straight, Mr. Camp—I'll take the boat job—I'll do anythin' to get the damned cops off my tail—I'd like to go out on some farm, but the boat's all right, Mr. Camp—thanks for the ten, and I'll pay you back—I've never been crooked, but I took a rap once—"

The Whisperer flashed around on Quick Trigger.

"You've always wanted the chance to make someone look like what he isn't," he said suddenly. "While this Kellow is out, I want you to fix him up so his own mother wouldn't know him. Anyway, I think his brain has gone straight and I figure perhaps we can use him."

Old Quick Trigger had for years made a study of disguises. He was responsible for The Whisperer being the odd figure he was. His deep eyes suddenly lighted.

"I've got an idea," he said. "Mayor Van Royston says this Chalmers, his neighbor, is always givin' ex-cons a chance on his big flower farm. Seems to be a kind-hearted sort of a guy, an' Van Royston likes him. Suppose I fix up this young fellow's face an' maybe we can get him a job up there. If his brain comes out O.K., he could get on the inside of the racket Van Royston an' Chalmers have been squawkin' about."

"It's an idea," agreed The Whisperer. "But stick here with him. By this time, Deputy Bolton has turned Royal Campano's place upside down. I've got a sudden hunch they might be able to use an odd garbage man over in the building where his penthouse is located."

Old Quick Trigger groaned. He had known all the time that The Whisperer had had his reason for issuing an order not to take Deuce Dimon into custody.

DEUCE DIMON may or may not have been surprised when the newspapers flared with the headlines of Royal Campano's murder. The dark-eyed, tall man read the extras. There was a strange smile on his bug face, deep in the dark orbs that always stared fixedly. Deuce Dimon talked slowly to himself, and made no effort to leave the penthouse, though he must have known the police would soon be along.

"So the boss went out to take care of a man called Kellow?" said Deuce, slowly and thoughtfully. "But he was all burned up when he got that dame's letter last night. The way I figure it, he has had this Kellow on ice for a long time, but he was not quite ready or there never would have been any Half-Moon Brotherhood meeting last night. And that is one swell break for Deuce Dimon. Two hundred grand is chicken feed!"

There had never been a direct rap pinned upon Royal Campano. Nor had the police ever connected Deuce Dimon with any crime. Suspected? Yes. More than that, Wildcat Gordon, Deputy Henry Bolton, others of the police knew the kind of money which maintained the expensive penthouse in the swanky district.

There were other racketeers like them in the big town. State and Federal authorities had succeeded in rooting out a few. But brains such as those of Royal Campano kept him from any direct connection with a dozen or more filthy rackets from which he drew his income.

Royal Campano was the brains. Deuce Dimon was his second brains. Sometimes Campano himself would have been surprised to know how far ahead of him was that mystical, astute mind of Deuce Dimon. It would have seemed that a man who had never been more than a cheap sideshow charlatan, posing as a hypnotist, would have considered two hundred grand a vast fortune.

Perhaps Royal Campano believed this of Deuce Dimon. Which proved he had not probed the depths of the man who had been his aide. For Deuce Dimon was thinking of six men other than Campano who today were nursing burned scars, half-moons, on their left forearms. And Deuce Dimon was fully aware that each of these six was at the head of a powerful racket of his own.

Moreover, in that floor safe under the flat-topped desk were signed murder confessions implicating each of the six. Deuce Dimon stretched his long legs comfortably and awaited the buzz that would tell the police had arrived. Whatever had

impelled Campano's sudden disappearance, Deuce was contemplating how he could carry on with the least risk and the greatest profit to himself.

One thing Deuce did: he fished into a desk and produced two flat stomach automatics. He did not make the mistake of having these upon him for the police to find. But he laid them under a loose tiling of the fireplace and resumed his seat. It appeared that Deuce was expecting visitors other than the police.

AT about this time, the gray Whisperer was near the Den of Dreams conducted by Ah Sun. His means of observation was simple. He was occupying a small room that overlooked the side street entrance to Ah Sun's den of vice. He could see all who came and went.

Twice The Whisperer emitted ghostly chuckles of satisfaction. Two men had hastily visited Ah Sun. One had carried a rolled newspaper. Both men were carrying their left arms stiffly. With binoculars, The Whisperer could read the concern in their faces.

The Whisperer nodded and chuckled. "So the taking off of Mr. Campano was hardly expected," he said softly.

The Whisperer went to a telephone and called a number. It was old Quick Trigger who replied with a worried voice. The Whisperer made an inquiry.

"You are making the change in our friend?" he said. "Can he talk rationally?"

"Partly," said Quick Trigger. "But he seems to think he has just come out of some stir. He talks about being an ex-con an' no good."

"Couldn't be better, if he keeps thinking that way," said The Whisperer. "Anything else?"

"Yes," said Quick Trigger. "I made the paraffin test of his fingers. The acid proves he had not fired that automatic or any other gun in the past forty-eight hours. There was a greasy rag around the tire iron that killed Dad Armour. There is no grease of any kind on Kellow's skin."

The Whisperer hung up and stuck to his post. He saw all who came and went from the Den of Dreams on China Hill.

IN the meantime, Deputy Henry Bolton lost no time in leading a squad to the penthouse of Royal Campano. Now Deputy Bolton was long-nosed, beady-eyed and snarling of voice. He was Mayor Van Royston's chief standby in the department. For years, Henry Bolton had hoped to become commissioner. The appointment of fighting Wildcat Gordon had been a sore blow.

So Deputy Bolton had two main objectives in life: one was to oust his commissioner; the other was to catch up with that mysterious, cop-defying figure, The Whisperer. Deputy Bolton had never progressed far in either of his hopes.

Deuce Dimon admitted Deputy Bolton and half a dozen men. The wooden-faced and emotionless Sergeant Thorsen accompanied the squad.

"So you're that rat, Dimon!" snarled Deputy Bolton. "Well, the boys will just be takin' you along to headquarters for a little talk. In the meantime—"

Sergeant Thorsen touched Bolton's arm.

"The chief says we are to put a guard on the penthouse and leave this Deuce Dimon here," he said quietly.

"Why you—"

Deputy Bolton started to roar. Sergeant Thorsen walked away as if he did not hear. Bolton gulped and rescinded his order. But he started the squad men ransacking the luxurious penthouse. Drawers were pulled out. Even rugs came up.

"I'm sure, gentlemen, you'll find nothin' here," suggested the smooth Deuce Dimon, "Now if you would care to look into Campano's safe."

Deputy Bolton roared at that. He had extra heat because his men had overlooked a tiny safe neatly concealed in a panel of the wall. Deuce Dimon opened it and stepped back.

Deputy Bolton fingered out several thousand in currency, some papers and some letters. In a minute he was yelling.

"There ain't anythin' here but some stuff about the fish business!" snapped Bolton. "No fish business ever built this dump! Nothin' but the shad market and—"

"Nuts!" muttered one of the squad men. "You mean suckers! This Campano wouldn't be dumb enough to leave anything around here!"

At that instant, Deputy Bolton pounced upon a small box. It was of black velvet. A row of sparkling stones was revealed when it snapped open.

"By heaven!" rapped out Deputy Bolton. "The Ragout rocks that's been missin' for six months!"

He whirled upon Deuce Dimon. The dark eyes looked straight into the small orbs of Henry Bolton.

"A woman brought them here and borrowed some money," said Deuce Dimon quietly.

"Yeah? Well, I'm pinchin' you for bein' a fence—"

"I only work here," remarked Deuce Dimon calmly. "It seems my job ended this mornin'. I have to look for another boss."

Deputy Bolton took the jewels. They were part of an unsolved robbery. But that was the only bit of evidence which suggested that Royal Campano was other than an estimable citizen. Bolton left three detectives with orders to see that no one entered or left the place.

"You stay here until I get orders to bring you in!" snapped Bolton at Deuce Dimon.

Deuce spread his hands helplessly.

"Gladly, gentlemen," he said quietly. "It is all the home I have for the present."

A few minutes later, Deputy Bolton was raging to Mayor Van Royston.

"I haven't seen Commissioner Gordon all day!" said Bolton. "Yet he gives orders to leave that Dimon rat on the loose! I think maybe Dimon himself bumped Campano off!"

"I want to find Gordon myself," stated Mayor Van Royston. "Arthur Chalmers came into town with me this morning. He is planning to raise the devil unless we stop a racket that's been holding up his drainage job!"

CHAPTER V
LITTLE GRAY JANITOR

DEUCE DIMON was an affable prisoner. He provided the three detectives with a round of drinks. Then he went and sat on the roof, gazing out over the city. The coppers had made a quick search when they arrived. They had discovered nothing on Deuce Dimon. But now two flat stomach guns lay inside his waistband.

Deuce murmured to himself.

"Ah Sun and Scabro will be the most dangerous," he said softly. "Ah Sun may come alone, or he may send others. There's somethin' screwy about this Commissioner Wildcat Gordon not havin' me taken to headquarters. If I had my mitts on that two hundred grand under the desk, I'd be lammin' out. I can put the touch on the others later."

The sun dipped and gray dusk slanted across the wide roof where the penthouse set. An elevator came up and a bent janitor in ragged, gray clothes used a small rake to gather refuse off the roof into a basket. He wore a round-brimmed hat, and his hair was white, like that of an old man. He walked with a stoop, and his pointed chin appeared to be covered with a stubble of dirty beard.

The detective yawned and wished Deuce Dimon would hand out another drink, but Deuce had gone inside the penthouse. Suddenly one of the dicks said, "Where did that janitor mug get to?"

"Heard him go back down in the cage," said another.

But this was a mistake. In the growing darkness, the bent, gray janitor had reached the door of the penthouse kitchen. He picked up some trash. Inside, Deuce Dimon could be heard moving about.

The gray janitor dropped his basket and brush abruptly. None saw him enter the penthouse kitchen. He glided on ground-gripping soles along the wall in the kitchen. The wall was deeply stained, and the man's figure hardly showed. Now he was slipping through the door of a connecting room.

He had never moved more quickly or silently. For he was The Whisperer.

There was no light except the vague grayness of the curtained window in the big room which The Whisperer had reached. But suddenly he crouched. He had heard the slight sound of something moving. Between him and the window the shadow of a great, flat-topped desk glided to one side.

The Whisperer could hear the rasping of another man's breath. This man was Deuce Dimon. Deuce slid to the window. He made certain the detectives were still outside. The Whisperer heard the faint clicking of steel tumblers. Some sort of safe was being opened.

THE WHISPERER dropped to his hands and knees and crawled forward. He could see the bulky shadow of the desk, hear Deuce Dimon breathing. Then Deuce made his one mistake: perhaps he judged himself well concealed below the level of the floor, and he needed a light.

A pencil ray leaped out briefly, was shut off. But in that instant, the hard-muscled figure of The Whisperer vaulted all the way over the intervening desk. He landed with hands outspread, gripping, and his fingers found Deuce Dimon's hair.

Deuce spit out an oath. He dropped packages of papers, or perhaps it was money, and swung a fist backed by a long arm. But The Whisperer made no sound. He simply slammed his shoulders ahead, ramming Deuce Dimon's head into the nearest object, which happened to be a steel box.

Deuce went limp, but as he did one of the detectives came running in, a flashlight swinging.

"What the hell an' all's comin' off?" he bawled out. "You, Dimon—"

The Whisperer had bunched the papers Deuce Dimon had been holding. They were inside his shirt. He sprang from the bottom of the floor safe and shot rights and lefts into the face of the dick holding the light.

The other two coppers were running in.

"Stay where you are!" came a chilling, penetrating whisper. "You will not be hurt! I am The Whisperer!"

"Great guns!" roared one dick. "Now I know—this Campano was—"

His shout spelled a wholly unexpected finish for the copper. This did not come from The Whisperer. In fact, The Whisperer dropped flat just in time to miss a whanging slug that came from a spitefully snapping silenced pistol. There were a dozen voices, guttural, Oriental.

Shadowy figures were pouring into the library, through windows and doors. The Whisperer heard one growled oath in Italian. It was the voice of Scabro. But all the other voices were the more sibilant Chinese.

Lurid, blue flame played from The Whisperer's hand. There was only a hissing, as if compressed air were being released. But two jabbering shadows leaped high, then fell down and lay quivering in the darkness.

"Hold 'em, Mike! The rats got me—I'm—"

That was one of the detectives. The Whisperer could tell death in any man's voice. The dick had thudded to the floor and quit speaking. It was apparent that the newcomers had knocked out the other two police guards.

The voice of Scabro yelled, "Did you hear it when we came in? That whisper?"

A Chinese voice replied, "Once having heard, none ever forgets."

None but Ah Sun himself could have spoken so calmly at such a moment. The Whisperer crept across the deep rug. He heard an Oriental command. It said, "Secure the documents first! Campano has died, but Deuce Dimon lives and now—"

The Whisperer felt the edge of the hole in which the big floor safe was concealed. He listened intently, attempting to place Ah Sun's position by his voice if it were repeated. But Ah Sun did not speak again.

Perhaps it was a foot or it may have been the swinging butt of a gun. The Whisperer's head rang, and one ear was almost torn off. He rolled into the hole containing the safe. He was already half stunned. No doubt Deuce Dimon was just recovering and unaware of all that had taken place.

But Deuce had pulled out one of his fiat stomach guns. The automatic slapped powder and flame across the hole in the floor. A slug nipped at The Whisperer's blurry hair. The powder stung his eyes. He was forced to project himself upon Deuce Dimon, driving home a blow to the throat that ordinarily would have broken the neck of many a man. Due to the fact that he was half blinded and crazed, The Whisperer's blow lacked its usual strength.

"Damn you to—"

Deuce Dimon squawked and fell back, his weapon leaving his hand. The Whisperer started to rear up, thinking to battle his way through the ring of invaders. He knew then only that they had come for something that had been held by the supposedly murdered Royal Campano. Something important enough to make murder but a trivial matter.

However, The Whisperer was aware that murder in all its aspects was but a casual philosophy with the wise, old Ah Sun. His Den of Dreams might have revealed many buried bones if ever its underground depths had been uncovered.

Once again The Whisperer used that hissing, icy voice that was caused by the peculiar formation of his dental plate.

"Stay where you are, Ah Sun, all of you! I can kill any or all and leave no trace!"

The Whisperer was at the edge of the hole in the floor. He held a weapon in each hand. They were small, but deadly pistols of his own devising. Their silencers were the most advanced ever perfected. His guns gave forth a hissing not unlike his own whispering voice.

He had hoped to bring movement, startled speech, either of which would give him a target in the darkness. Instead, he heard but a low, Oriental oath and he was struck down so suddenly and inexorably that he had no time to employ either gun.

IN some manner, Ah Sun must have found the mechanism operating the big sliding desk. The heavy piece of furniture snapped back into place as if it were floating in oil. The edge clipped The Whisperer's forehead. When he thrust up an arm, he was forced to withdraw it quickly to avert its amputation.

Ah Sun's Oriental laugh mocked him as he fell, and the desk formed a cage from which even a fly could not have escaped. The Whisperer fell beside Deuce Dimon, and then Deuce spoke in a choking voice.

"Whisperer, or whoever you are, you have put us in a sweet spot! We can live in here five minutes, or maybe twice that long! You killed one of the coppers! Ah Sun and his crowd have us! Maybe you're the mug that Campano has been playin' along with! I knew he was goin' to take a run—a run—"

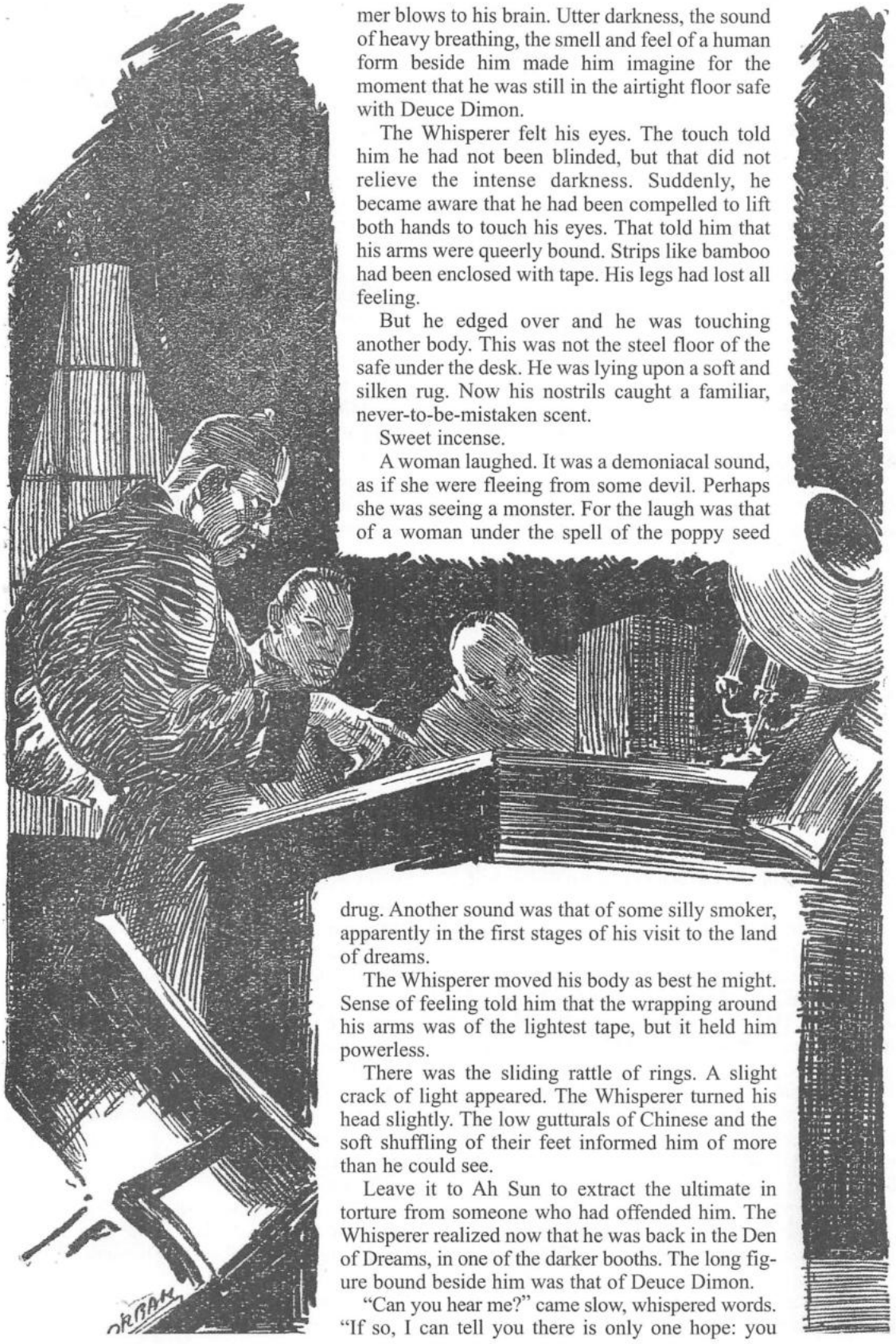
Deuce Dimon ceased speaking for the simple reason that the few feet of space afforded no breathable air. The hole in the floor was airtight, designed for the steel-walled safe and not for a hideout. The Whisperer himself had tremendous lungs, great staying ability. But in here there was no sound, only a few cramped feet of space.

"You believe Campano is dead—" The Whisperer got out that much in his husky voice, but he, too, quit talking. The space seemed to be whirling queerly. It was a mocking situation. A few minutes before, he and Deuce Dimon had been at each other's throats. The brainy aide of Royal Campano had done his best to kill him.

Now it would be necessary for either to have the blood of the other upon his hands. The Whisperer felt Deuce Dimon's long-fingered hand reach out and touch his face, then it fell away. Deuce gave a great, gasping sigh. That was the last that The Whisperer heard, for it seemed that his own lungs were about to collapse.

The Whisperer knew then only that he was choking, that he struck his head as he fought for air and that he fell down and ceased to think.

THERE was a strange sensation when The Whisperer's senses came pounding back like ham-



mer blows to his brain. Utter darkness, the sound of heavy breathing, the smell and feel of a human form beside him made him imagine for the moment that he was still in the airtight floor safe with Deuce Dimon.

The Whisperer felt his eyes. The touch told him he had not been blinded, but that did not relieve the intense darkness. Suddenly, he became aware that he had been compelled to lift both hands to touch his eyes. That told him that his arms were queerly bound. Strips like bamboo had been enclosed with tape. His legs had lost all feeling.

But he edged over and he was touching another body. This was not the steel floor of the safe under the desk. He was lying upon a soft and silken rug. Now his nostrils caught a familiar, never-to-be-mistaken scent.

Sweet incense.

A woman laughed. It was a demoniacal sound, as if she were fleeing from some devil. Perhaps she was seeing a monster. For the laugh was that of a woman under the spell of the poppy seed drug. Another sound was that of some silly smoker, apparently in the first stages of his visit to the land of dreams.

The Whisperer moved his body as best he might. Sense of feeling told him that the wrapping around his arms was of the lightest tape, but it held him powerless.

There was the sliding rattle of rings. A slight crack of light appeared. The Whisperer turned his head slightly. The low gutturals of Chinese and the soft shuffling of their feet informed him of more than he could see.

Leave it to Ah Sun to extract the ultimate in torture from someone who had offended him. The Whisperer realized now that he was back in the Den of Dreams, in one of the darker booths. The long figure bound beside him was that of Deuce Dimon.

"Can you hear me?" came slow, whispered words. "If so, I can tell you there is only one hope: you

must not speak, but leave everythin' to me. I have that for which we may trade our lives."

"What is it?" breathed The Whisperer. "What did Ah Sun seek in the vault of Royal Campano?"

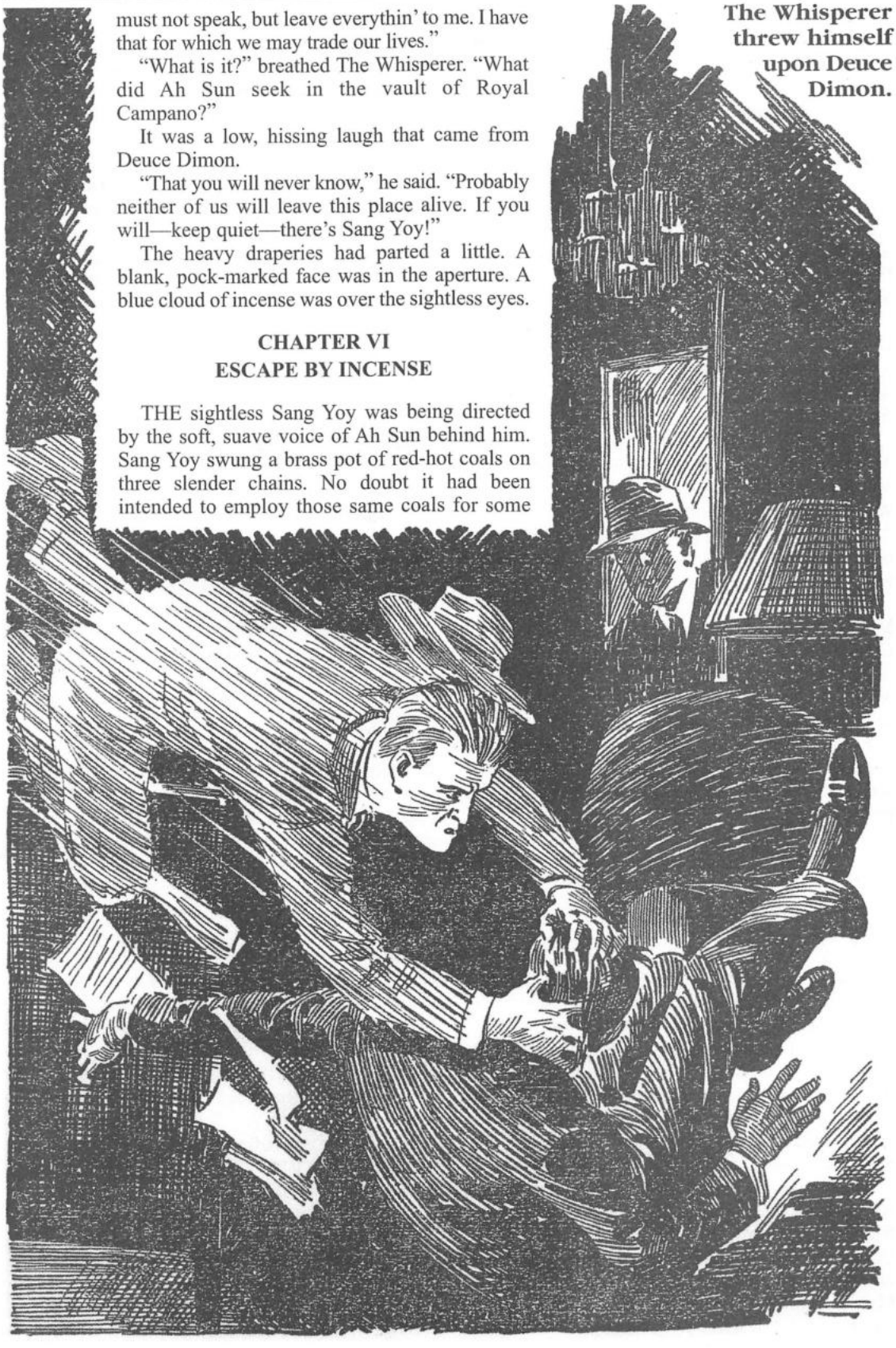
It was a low, hissing laugh that came from Deuce Dimon.

"That you will never know," he said. "Probably neither of us will leave this place alive. If you will—keep quiet—there's Sang Yoy!"

The heavy draperies had parted a little. A blank, pock-marked face was in the aperture. A blue cloud of incense was over the sightless eyes.

CHAPTER VI
ESCAPE BY INCENSE

THE sightless Sang Yoy was being directed by the soft, suave voice of Ah Sun behind him. Sang Yoy swung a brass pot of red-hot coals on three slender chains. No doubt it had been intended to employ those same coals for some



The Whisperer threw himself upon Deuce Dimon.

devilish purpose devised by Ah Sun.

There was a sudden disturbance, shuffling attendants were gabbling. A woman cried out in an opium dream. Wildcat could almost see the yellow fingers that abruptly choked off her breath.

One attendant was speaking to Ah Sun. Wildcat caught the English words. "Honorable Mayor Van Royston." Ah Sun swore in Chinese, but immediately he was issuing quick orders. His men were restoring order in the Den of Dreams. It seemed, incredibly, that a party of slummers was entering the place and that the "Honorable Mayor Van Royston" must be the conductor.

Such incursions into China Hill were not rare. One of Wildcat Gordon's raw spots had been being forced to wink at some flagrant violations of the law. These were sightseeing places for visitors from out of town.

"I tell you, Chalmers, these foul places should be wiped out!" came the pompous voice of Mayor Van Royston. "Your guests will have the idea that such places are common."

"Not at all, Mayor! Not at all! I just wanted the boys to have a look around on our China Hill! It was good of you to have your coppers arrange it!"

The voice was hearty, booming. It belonged to Mayor Van Royston's farm neighbor, Arthur Chalmers. He was an immense man, a six-footer, with broad, capable shoulders. There was now a twinkle in his gray-blue eyes. A shock of iron-gray hair came down over a pair of huge ears.

Sang Yoy, the blind one, had swiftly drawn the curtains concealing Wildcat and Deuce Dimon. He set the brass pot of blazing coals on the rug just inside the draperies. But there was a slight opening through which Wildcat had a glimpse of Mayor Van Royston and his party.

Mayor Van Royston was a perfect city man, from his correct spats to his high silk hat. But his chin sloped the wrong way, and he had to push his chest far out to make it appear impressive. Van Royston was always in a pompous, mostly a jovial mood.

The reform party had elected him because he did have influence with a good class of citizens, those of the higher social strata. For the same reason, the reform party committee had made Wildcat Gordon police commissioner. Because Wildcat knew the lowdown on that other strata of society, the underworld, and could be counted upon to ride roughshod over crooks.

"The boys" spoken of by the big, blustering Arthur Chalmers apparently were visiting farmer friends from out of town. Wildcat knew that Chalmers was more than a farmer, being somewhat of a Burbank among flowers. In fact, much of Mayor Van Royston's friendship for Chalmers had arisen because of a mutual interest in rare blooms.

THERE were six men besides Van Royston and Chalmers in the party of "slummers." Now Wildcat saw that Deputy Henry Bolton and one of his detectives were acting as guards to the visitors. Deputy Bolton was striding along importantly, gesturing to Ah Sun to do this and that.

Ah Sun could have been a king in a royal palace, judging by his courtesy. That Den of Dreams had suddenly revealed only a few old Chinese lying in the bunks. True, the opium cooking stands were in evidence, but Ah Sun cleverly pointed out that these were kept more for show than anything else.

Big Arthur Chalmers was the life and spirit of the party.

"You see, boys, we have to keep something to show you hicks!" he said, with a booming laugh. "All of this once was a real dope joint, I understand, but under the administration of Mayor Van Royston, it's nothing much more than a place to show the folks! Eh, Ah Sun?"

Chalmers jabbed Ah Sun's skinny ribs with a blunt elbow, and the Chinese murmured assent and moved on. Mayor Van Royston was nodding agreement. It was nice to be regarded as a great reform mayor, also to be the host to such a party.

Only Deputy Bolton glared around, saying nothing. Bolton had attempted a few times to clean out Ah Sun's hell spot, and each time he had failed. Bolton had not known, perhaps never would know, that Wildcat Gordon had been responsible for his dubbing the raids.

For Wildcat Gordon had been playing Ah Sun for months, in his identity of D. Smith, seeking certain contacts that might wipe out much more important organized rackets. In fact, it was this that had led Wildcat Gordon into his present predicament as The Whisperer. For his association with Ah Sun had brought him to the mysterious half-moon burned into the palm of his own hand.

Mayor Van Royston's party passed on. The Whisperer might have cried out, created a disturbance and started all hell loose while the party was nearby. But he had no desire to be rescued as The Whisperer, or to be found in a situation that might endanger the lives of the visitors.

For The Whisperer was fully aware that many curtained booths had been concealed. That perhaps half a hundred of Ah Sun's yellow henchmen lurked in the shadows, watching the visitors. It would not have been well to have blown the lid off that pot at the moment.

Deuce Dimon was whispering beside The Whisperer.

"The infernal saps!" he said. "That deputy's the same cop who was up in Campano's place. I'll bet the police take plenty of rake-down on this dump, to let Ah Sun get away with it. But we've got to

work fast. As soon as the slummers are out, that yellow devil is going to work on us."

This was no news to The Whisperer. By this time, he was sure that Ah Sun had identified him as D. Smith, who had long tricked him. No doubt he had seen the burned half-moon in the palm of his hand. Whatever Ah Sun intended sweating out of the missing Royal Campano's possessions, The Whisperer was due for some very special and refined treatment.

The Whisperer coughed huskily. The Den of Dreams was resuming its normal status. Perhaps Mayor Van Royston and his friend, Chalmers, had passed on out. Anyway, attendants again were shuffling. Restrained cries of smokers were being emitted again.

The Whisperer was doing some whimsical thinking. Here was Arthur Chalmers, the flower specialist, helping play host to slummers in Ah Sun's joint. And at the same time, Chalmers had been complaining of an extortion racket holding up drainage work on his big city farm.

"Hellamighty!" breathed The Whisperer. "That guy Chalmers has been a lot closer tonight to the source of his troubles than he imagines! I'd place a bet that some of this Campano crowd is behind the holdup on Chalmers' farm!"

There was no time for further thinking. Doors were closing, Once more the filthy den was resounding to the nightmarish cries of drugged women and men. The Whisperer realized that a choking, blue smoke had caused him to cough. It came from the soft, silken draperies across the booth.

That brass pot of red-hot coals. The blind Sang Yoy had set it there hastily. In a minute or two, Ah Sun would be returning. The irate Chinese would fritter away no more time on his prisoners. Deuce Dimon suddenly whispered hoarsely.

THE gray-clad body of The Whisperer was convulsed. His bound feet went over the edge of the bunk. Toes hooked into loose chains. The feet snapped up. Blazing coals scattered in a shower. Some spotted the face of Deuce Dimon, and he exploded, "You crazy, damn fool! What are you—"

But The Whisperer had his taped wrists over the burning brass pot. The binding and skin smoked together. At the same time, a thin flame ran up the silken draperies, spreading swiftly,

"You'll burn us alive, you idiot!" snapped Deuce Dimon.

The Whisperer emitted a ghostly chuckle. If he didn't do the burning, Ah Sun was no doubt at this moment planning something of the same sort. The taped bindings over The Whisperer's wrists scorched off just as the blaze seared over his face.

There were sudden, gabbled curses in the corridor of the Den of Dreams. The Whisperer's hands were burned, but he caught the brass pot with the remainder of its red coals and hurled it into other draperies across the narrow space.

Flame jumped from silk to silk as if powder had been touched off. The Whisperer reared up. He jerked the tape from his own legs, off Deuce Dimon's wrists and ankles. At this moment, they were engulfed in a fiery draft of smoke and fire.

When The Whisperer gained his feet, he went through a curtain of fire with fists swinging at the nearest Orientals. Two attendants fell. But others made no attempt to check the movements of the two prisoners. The length of the curtained Den of Dreams was whiffing bright flame, burning the draperies, bringing thick, choking smoke from the rugs.

The attendants were fighting the fire. They were pulling drugged sleepers from bunks, pushing them out. Ah Sun was screaming commands from somewhere toward one of the several Street entrances.

"This way!" hissed The Whisperer, dragging big Deuce Dimon past smoking booths, "The last place Ah Sun will look for us!"

They pushed through what had looked like a solid wall, but which was easily divided at a touch. Here was a round-domed room. Its furnishings were lavish, exquisite. Braziers of incense smoked before what might have been a throne.

"Ah Sun's own den!" breathed The Whisperer. "Stick to me! There's a tunnel back of that carved chair. It leads to the river, and it's Ah Sun's own private exit. Hell! Listen!"

From the corridor of the Den of Dreams arose shrieks of anger and pain. Flame and smoke vomited through all that portion of Ah Sun's place. But Ah Sun had got the smokers out, and his men were closing off a solid door that must have been fireproof.

"The Smith!" called out Ah Sun. "The Deuce Dimon! Find them and bring them to me!"

The Whisperer was behind Ah Sun's throne chair. A floor trapdoor opened at his touch. He was shoving Deuce Dimon into it when among the other cries and screams came the clear, agonized voice of a woman. So clear in its wording was the cry that there could be little thought of it proceeding from a drugged tongue.

"Father! Father! Please, where are you? Where are—"

Deuce Dimon was halfway into the escape tunnel. The Whisperer lifted him out, hurled him back.

"Not yet, Dimon !" he commanded huskily. "That's something I hadn't counted on! There must have been a woman with the mayor's party! We'll wait—"

Deuce Dimon wrenched himself violently to one side.

When The Whisperer gained his feet, he went through the curtain of fire with fists swinging at the nearest Orientals.

"Me, I'm leavin' while the going's good!" he gritted.

The Whisperer jerked the big man's head downward with fingers hooked in his hair. At the same time, he heeled him on the chin with the hard palm of his other hand. Deuce Dimon staggered, almost collapsed.

"You!" hissed The Whisperer. "You'll stick with me, or I'll throw you back to Ah Sun and his wolves! Over there! That girl, while I take the Chinks!"

THE girl was dressed in pure, flowing white. Her garb merged with the paleness of a beautiful face framed by a bound coil of bright, honey-colored hair. That there was no bob was in itself remarkable. The girl's eyes were hazel, and the hair and the whiteness gave her a spiritual appearance.

"Father! Please!"

She screamed again as yellow talons closed over her pulsing, sore throat. There were three huge Chinese. One had caught the girl. The other two now seized her knees and arms, lifting her.

"Take her to Ah Sun!"

The words were Chinese, but The Whisperer understood. Moreover, at that instant, he saw the thin, shrunken face of Ah Sun appear from behind a drapery. The Chinese boss was staring at the girl as if he had never seen her before.

Then Ah Sun said, "She calls for her father, is it so?"

The three Chinese had lifted the girl's gracious, curving body in their vile, obscene hands. Their yellow faces mirrored the enjoyment of a new and perhaps a choice bit of adventure. Such as this girl in the pure white clothing seldom entered the Den of Dreams.

"Take the girl, or I'll—"

It was the eerie, penetrating whisper that had chilled many crooks. The Whisperer's iron hands fairly threw Deuce Dimon into the middle of the room. At the same time, The Whisperer shot out a foot that cracked a Chinese ankle. He followed it with a twisting, diving movement that smashed his own hard head into an Oriental chin.

There was left only the man holding the girl's throat. The girl's body fell to a rug, and this Chinese whipped a gleaming knife from his blouse. The blade went up and the Chinese was smart enough to hold it above the girl's throat, instead of attacking The Whisperer.

A small image of green jade reflected light across the narrow space. It had been caught up by The Whisperer. The hard, heavy statue made a ghastly sound and a gruesome wound as it crunched into flesh and bone. What had been the flat nose of the Chinese with the knife was converted to pulp.

The knife fell to the floor. Deuce Dimon was slipping away again toward the tunnel exit behind Ah Sun's throne chair. The Whisperer now held the knife by its point. Ah Sun himself was scuttling across the den, screaming for others of his men who were still fighting the fire.

"Carry the girl out, Dimon, or I'll split your lousy spine!" came that chilling whisper. "I could cut off your nose at forty feet with this knife."

The tall, angular Deuce Dimon seldom showed fear in his eyes of Hindu caste, but they were dark now—and furtive. Three Chinese lay writhing on the floor. The Whisperer was calmly aiming the pointed knife at Deuce Dimon's head.

Ah Sun rushed forward, hands reaching. One of The Whisperer's heels flew back and up, though his eyes never left Deuce Dimon. Ah Sun's head rocked, and he fell down and lay still.

CHAPTER VII
VICIOUS BRIAN BORU

THE hard point of a knife touched Deuce Dimon's neck as he put the pale-faced girl into the seat of a police coupé. The little car had been standing in a side street of China Hill, not many blocks from Ah Sun's Den of Dreams.

There was bedlam, fire and police sirens, a rushing of crowds in the vicinity of the place where smoke had poured from underground doors. The Whisperer got under the wheel of the coupé and the car rocketed into a side street.

"What the hell's this gettin' us?" grunted Deuce Dimon. "Where do you hook up with Royal Campano? You are not one of the other six!"

"Be quiet!" commanded The Whisperer, being wholly in ignorance of what Deuce Dimon might mean. "Don't talk unless you want to tell me what has become of Campano!"

Deuce Dimon stared straight ahead. The pale-faced girl was murmuring. The coupé gathered speed. It shot into a street blocked by fire hose and a police line. The Whisperer gritted an oath and suddenly a siren screamed under his car's hood.

The police line parted and the coupé cut over the hose. But a police squad car was standing at the corner. Deputy Henry Bolton had left Mayor Van Royston's party. Now he saw the speeding coupé, perhaps had a glimpse of the limp figure of the girl between The Whisperer and Deuce Dimon.

Deputy Bolton's siren screamed. The deputy police commissioner was giving chase with two of his men. The Whisperer rocked his coupé around the next corner, but the squad car cut through an alley. It was headed off China Hill, following the slum-infested shore of West River. Steel columns of elevated tracks flashed by.

"I don't know who you are," said the girl suddenly. "But I must thank you. I hope my father is all right. I am Clara Chalmers, and I was following him when I got into that awful place. I came home today for the first time since I was a little girl, and my father had not expected me. I thought it would be fun to find him suddenly, but I missed him and—"

"Your father is Arthur Chalmers, and he lives on a big flower farm then?" said The Whisperer huskily.

"Yes! Yes! Oh, I hope he escaped from that fire! Why did those awful Chinese men seize me? I had only asked about my father, then I was taken—"

"The ways of the Chinese never can be explained," said The Whisperer. "But I'm glad we found you! Now, both of you hang on and brace yourselves! That cop's car is coming across the next block!"

They were in a district where the buildings were tall, old and dark. Loft buildings mingled with ratty tenements. The streets were hardly more than

one-way alleys. The Whisperer suddenly piled the coupé over the sidewalk toward a vacant lot.

The hood collided with a fence and fenders cracked.

"Help the girl, Dimon!" commanded The Whisperer. "And no funny moves, or you'll have a choice between a bullet and the cops!"

THE WHISPERER had taken a small automatic from the pocket of the car. The girl was in Deuce Dimon's long, powerful arms. As The Whisperer flashed out of the door, there was a flare of fire. A blaze of gasoline ran over the body of the coupé.

At the same time, Deputy Bolton's squad car was sending the slum residents scurrying for their dubious rooms. Its siren was wailing and it was hurrying along the river street.

Had The Whisperer continued, he would have been almost surely blocked.

But when the coupé flamed, the police squad car squealed its brakes and backed around to get into the alley. Deputy Bolton could be heard shouting.

"Damn 'em! Deuce Dimon was in that car! They've cracked up, and it's burnin'!"

Bolton and his squad men came pouring across the vacant lot. Because of the fierce flame and thick smoke, it was impossible to determine if any of the occupants still were in the car.

Deuce Dimon was supporting the pale-faced Clara Chalmers, and she was sobbing. The Whisperer glided beside them. They arrived at a narrow alley. Many cars and pedestrians were passing on a street a short block away. All along the alley itself there were loft buildings with a few rusted fire escapes. Bolton and his men could be heard shouting and swearing back by the burning coupé. The deputy was doubly mad, because he believed the police car had been stolen.

The Whisperer touched the girl's arm. He had pulled a gray raincoat from the little car as it smashed. He wrapped the coat around the girl's shoulders.

"You are safe enough now, Miss Chalmers," he said huskily. "You will walk to that lighted street and hail the first taxicab. You must go home at once. It would be best if you do not tell your father about your experience tonight. That might involve him in trouble with dangerous people."

Clara Chalmers stared at the gray Whisperer. His face was nearly concealed.

"I thank you," she said quietly. "And who will I—"

"It doesn't matter," said The Whisperer. "Go quickly. Hail a taxi, and do not stop for anyone!"

Deuce Dimon was staring at The Whisperer. The girl flitted toward the lighted street.

"All right, what's the answer?" said Deuce Dimon.

"Just this!" said The Whisperer suddenly.

His right hand was filled with the hard metal of a pistol. It came up like the driving head of a piston. Less than a minute later, Dimon's long body was unbelievably draped over one hard shoulder of The Whisperer. He was being carried up one of the rusty fire escapes.

A door grated on rusty hinges. There was a snarling whine and two eyes glowed in the darkness. The Whisperer did not delay to switch on a light. He was in one of his many disreputable hideouts. He deposited the unconscious Deuce Dimon on a sagging, old bed and swiftly went through the man's pockets.

But he was sure he would find nothing. Ah Sun had beaten him to anything of importance that Deuce Dimon might have been carrying.

"Watch him, Brian Boru!" commanded The Whisperer.

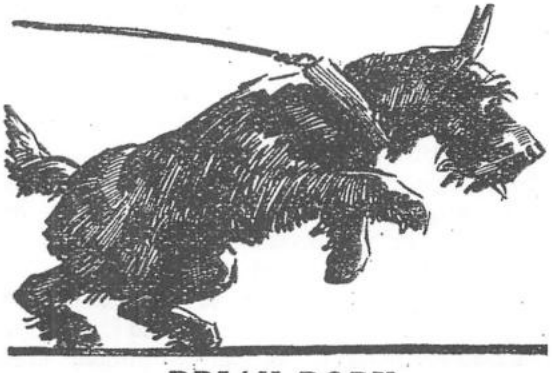
The Scottish terrier seemed to snarl a reply. The black dog flattened on his stomach, glowing eyes fixed upon the figure of the man on the bed. His white, vicious fangs were slightly bared. The Whisperer had never found it necessary to bind or gag a prisoner when Brian Boru was at hand.

Anyway, at this moment, The Whisperer expected to be absent only a few minutes, and Deuce Dimon was out cold. The Whisperer wanted to make sure that the strangely appearing Clara Chalmers reached her home safely. He planned to contact old Quick Trigger and Sergeant Thorsen, and have them discover when the girl arrived.

The Whisperer went back down the fire escape. The blaze of his burning coupé was dying down. Deputy Bolton and his men had searched the neighborhood, without result. Bolton at this time had no thought he had been right on the heels of The Whisperer. It was Deuce Dimon and the girl he did not know that had drawn his attention.

CLARA CHALMERS had followed The Whisperer's directions implicitly.

The girl had long been in a convent. She had said she had not visited her home for several years.



BRIAN BORU

To have stumbled into a Chinese den of vice was an extraordinary experience for such a young woman. Yet her eyes were shining with excitement as she emerged on the more-traveled street.

"I'll have to tell him—no, I won't," she said to herself. "Poor father, he would worry his head off. I'll just explain I was late getting home, and then went out and lost my way."

Cars flowed by in four streams. The pale-faced girl hesitated. In the quiet convent she had not been much accustomed to the roar and stirring movement of city life. She walked slowly toward the nearest corner. There was a taxicab stand there, with three empty cabs.

The girl had almost reached these cabs, but she turned back and walked again along the block. She was at the mouth of the alley and looking down the dark narrow way.

Who was this strange, whispering man who had rescued her? she thought. Why had he been threatening that other man? Perhaps she should tell her father and have him give the mysterious man some kind of reward. Why—

The closed car that braked to a stop at the alley mouth was not a taxicab. In fact, Clara Chalmers was not looking in that direction as two yellow-faced men suddenly shuffled to the sidewalk. When a hand touched one shoulder, the girl would have screamed, but a foul, hard palm was slapped over her mouth.

Clara Chalmers saw there was no other person nearby. She attempted to twist free. One hand caught the blouse-like garment of one of the men. A sharp, hard object cut her hand and she let go suddenly. Something tinkled to the pavement in the mouth of the alley, but the girl was being carried now across the sidewalk.

A damp cloth went over the girl's face and she was thrust to the floor of the closed car behind the front seat. She had one glimpse of a face she had seen before. It was the scrawny, evil countenance of Ah Sun.

Very apparently, the Chinese dope king had been much more clever in his trailing than had Deputy Henry Bolton, or perhaps he had been smitten with luck in seeing the girl on the street.

The anesthetic shut out the girl's senses as the closed car glided into the four-stream traffic.

"The gods have smiled," stated Ah Sun solemnly to the men with him. "She will not talk here, but when the little red spiders have finished crawling, we will know the whereabouts of this D. Smith and the Deuce Dimon. Perhaps she may be the friend of Royal Campano, and she might talk of that, too."

Another Chinese shook his head solemnly.

"This woman is not of the kind who would be the friend of Campano," he said wisely. "She was one of the Honorable Mayor Van Royston's party, so we must be most careful."

"She will talk to the little red spiders," said Ah Sun softly. "We must know all that Deuce Dimon and Royal Campano arranged before Campano joined his most unworthy ancestors."

If there was doubt of Campano's murder in Ah Sun's mind, he did not voice it. The closed car glided into a side street and climbed back toward China Hill.

IT could not have been more than a minute or two after Clara Chalmers was seized that The Whisperer glided from the mouth of the dark alley. He walked quickly to the corner taxicab stand. His husky voice inquired if a taxi had just taken a girl wearing a gray raincoat and a white dress.

Three drivers emphatically stated no fare had been taken within the past half hour. Then one driver said, "Why, yes, boss. I did see a girl. She came up this way, then she went back to the alley in the middle of the block, I thought she was waiting for someone, for a big car stopped and—"

The Whisperer was already on his way back to the mouth of the dark alley. The block here was deserted. He walked slowly, looking along the curbing for tire marks made by sudden braking. There it was. A streak of rubber from one locked wheel.

Suddenly, The Whisperer's eyes were held by a gleaming object on the pavement, He palmed it, turned it over. Oaths hissed from his throat. He was looking at a piece of jade shaped like a crescent. A bit of silk was attached to the pin that had fastened the ornament.

"Ah Sun!" exclaimed The Whisperer. "Hellamighty! I'm seventeen kinds of a dumbhead! He wants me and he wants Deuce Dimon, so—"

With his dental plate removed, Wildcat Gordon rapped commands over the nearest telephone. He found Quick Trigger had returned to his apartment and he talked to him there. Quick Trigger said that Dude Kellow had been left asleep and would be all right until morning.

"That will keep, Quick Trigger!" rapped out Wildcat. "But there's hell to pay on China Hill. Slip on your Chinese makeup and meet me at Ah Sun's place in Paradise Street in ten minutes! This time we have to make it an open raid! There's a girl mixed up in it, and her life isn't worth a thin dime if we fail to reach her quickly enough!"

For the next few minutes, Wildcat Gordon was issuing explicit orders to Sergeant Tom Thorsen. He instructed him to block in all of Ah Sun's place in Paradise Street and to be ready to smash through.

"Right, chief!" agreed Sergeant Thorsen, whose voice never told much. "Thought you might like to know Mayor Van Royston has been looking all

over for you. Says you've got to do something about this extortion racket that's been worked on his friend, Arthur Chalmers."

"Tell the mayor I'll be looking into that suddenly," stated Wildcat. "In the meantime, you might advise him to keep his friends off China Hill. You have Ah Sun's joint staked out within the next half hour."

"It's as good as done," promised Sergeant Thorsen.

AT about this time, old Quick Trigger believed he was working a fast one on Tiny Traeger. That sharp-eyed, doll-like girl did not appear to notice when her grandfather slid from the house. But she had not missed that he was made up as an aged and shuffling Chinaman.

"Now what's that pair up to?" said pretty Tiny grimly. "I'll bet it's one of the reasons Wildcat hasn't been home tonight and—"

The telephone buzzed. It was Mayor Van Royston. His voice was angry.

"You tell Wildcat to get in touch with me as soon as he comes in!" was the mayor's snappy order. "There has been a lot of trouble up on China Hill, and it's time the commissioner was getting on the job. You tell him that my friend, Arthur Chalmers, is having more trouble. His daughter came from school tonight and now he's afraid she has been kidnapped from his house! You—"

"Yes, Mayor Van Royston," interrupted Tiny. "Perhaps I can find Wildcat and I'll tell him to call you right away."

Tiny's blue eyes were snapping now. She knew her grandfather had an odd habit. There was a scratch pad near the telephone. An address was penciled upon it. Quick Trigger had marked it as he talked to Wildcat before he went out.

The address was "Forty-four Paradise Street, China Hill."

Tiny's curved mouth took on a hard line.

"So the next stop will be Forty-four Paradise Street," she said grimly.

Tiny had her own fast roadster. She shot it out of the garage space of their penthouse loft building and headed into the night mist. She did not know a great deal about China Hill, and still less about Paradise Street.

The roadster was slowed on the winding, narrow hills that ascended from the river and water front. Tiny could see only a few shuffling figures around her. Chinese were scuttling from one doorway to another, their hands in their sleeves.

The Orientals were acting with more than usual furtiveness tonight. The name of Ah Sun was a power on China Hill. Had there not been a big smoke and much gathering of the policemen in Paradise Street? It would be well for the lesser Chinese to walk softly and not too prominently.

Nevertheless, a closed car picked up Tiny's roadster as it entered Paradise Street. It remained a block away, but kept pace with the smaller car. Tiny could not make out the numbers, if any, on the foggy stone walls, and she was looking for forty-four.

The doll-like girl was beginning to believe she had been foolish in coming, and was leaning from the window looking at a doorway that had been recently blackened by smoke.

"The missee will keep vellee quiet," said a soft voice in her ear.

Tiny would have cried out, but she kept very quiet because of a knife point touching her rounded breast. A tall, dignified Chinese had somehow got into the seat beside her.

"Dlive on, missee," he instructed.

Tiny Traeger drove on. Though the blocks were closely staked by Sergeant Thorsen's picked men, her roadster went into an alleyway unnoticed.

CHAPTER VIII
BURNING RED SPIDERS

THE WHISPERER was a small, shuffling figure. For the time, he had considered it expedient to change into the round hat and the blouse of a Chinese. He was apparently leading an old, toddling Chinaman whose eyes had ceased to see.

"You say the girl is Clara Chalmers, Wildcat?" said old Quick Trigger softly, for he was the blind Chinaman. "Damn, we ain't doin' so good! Add that to Chalmers' other troubles an' Mayor Van Royston will be kickin' you out on your ear!"

They were in Paradise Street. Chinese passed, but none seemed to observe them closely. The Whisperer had been at a phone. In Wildcat Gordon's voice he had issued final instructions.

"When you hear three quick shots, start blasting hell out of the whole dump, Sergeant Thorsen! But be sure and get Ah Sun and a girl in a white dress! If she is hurt—"

Now The Whisperer had a regular automatic concealed in one of his loose sleeves. Quick Trigger was packing two of his ponderous old police revolvers.

They sounded like cannons, but they usually got positive results.

"I have a password that will get us by the side door, Quick Trigger," said The Whisperer. "Ah Sun's den is the first door to the right. Once inside, I'll break for the door, and you pull three shots for Thorsen. If you happen to knock off a few of Ah Sun's yellow devils, it will not be any great loss to society."

Thus it seemed that the police trap was set and baited to rescue Clara Chalmers, if she had survived any torture that might have been applied within the past hour. Old Quick Trigger leaned on

The Whisperer's shoulder, as if he were being guided by him.

Knuckles rapped at a low-set side door. A narrow wicket opened and a pair of black pebbles showed for eyes. But at that instant, two persons crossed the street and entered another door a few yards away. Quick Trigger emitted a strictly American oath.

"Tiny, by hell! Wildcat, lookit!"

The Whisperer had whipped around. His own face was now like that of a Chinese, so it showed no expression. His fingers pinched Quick Trigger's arm, and his voice whispered:

"Don't start anything here! Inside! Get to Ah Sun!"

Then The Whisperer spoke two words in Chinese, making a pantomime with his fingers. That same password had admitted most persons to the presence of Ah Sun. The door wicket closed and the door itself opened. Quick Trigger was pushed ahead, and The Whisperer was about to follow.

"Grandpa! Over here!"

Tiny had seen Quick Trigger in his makeup. She had made the mistake of crying out. The Whisperer pivoted. Some instinct sent his head down a few inches. Those inches saved his life.

A HATCHET whirred out of the street darkness and tumbled The Whisperer's hat to the street. The sharp blade was buried with a clunk in the stout wood of the door. The Whisperer rammed himself forward, removing the yellow keeper of the door with a slashing blow to the man's stomach.

Old Quick Trigger was maddened enough to have dashed back into the street. But the other door had closed upon Tiny and a tall Chinese who had been gripping her arm.

It was The Whisperer's automatic that spat out three shots and caused the doorways along the street to begin spewing plainclothes men with guns in their side pockets, led by a dozen stalwarts in blue who carried machine guns and axes.

Sergeant Thorsen was starting his hell-smashing attack.

But just inside the doorway, The Whisperer and Quick Trigger were suddenly blocked by a mass of Chinese. They filled the passage, knives and hatchets whirling. The Whisperer pulled Quick Trigger down.

Two hissing, silenced pistols flamed in The Whisperer's hands. Yellow men fell down, moaning. The modern automatics took heavy toll of their shinbones and cut them off at their feet.

IN the meantime, before the sound of the breaking raid could be heard, old Ah Sun sat like a yellow scarecrow in his big throne chair. The sweet smoke of incense curled around his scrawny body and covered his already half-veiled eyes.

Two huge Chinamen stood beside a hard wooden couch set before Ah Sun. Clara Chalmers lay upon this rough resting place. Her wrists and ankles were clasped with wrapped thongs. One Chinese caught the back of her white dress and tore it away until nearly all the girl's smooth, lovely shoulders and back were exposed.

The girl's hazel eyes were open, staring. Not yet did she know what manner of torture was about to be inflicted.

She had heard English words spoken by the terrible Ah Sun that had caused her to shudder.

"You will speak of the whispering Smith and the tall one who took you away," said Ah Sun, "Or when you are deep in the drug of the gods, I will give you to others who will compel you to speak. Where have they gone, my very pretty one?"

"I do not know! Oh, I do not know!"

The girl half sobbed the words. She wanted to tell this awful Chinese that her father was Arthur Chalmers, a powerful and wealthy man who would destroy him if she were harmed. Yet she feared to involve her father in some danger of which The Whisperer had spoken.

"Perhaps," went on Ah Sun, "you might know if the wise dead one still lives. This Royal Campano? Where is he?"

"I've never heard of him!" gritted the girl. "Oh, please! You are making some terrible mistake! I will never—"

"The little red ones, Chang," spoke Ah Sun softly.

One Chinaman lifted a small carved box. Its lid opened. Three or four tiny red insects fell upon the girl's smooth, white back. They started crawling. Suddenly her curving, tempting body was writhing, and a scream of agony was torn from her whitening lips.

"Don't—they burn—oh, father—"

The small insects were red spiders. As they crawled, burned, stinging welts appeared upon the girl's white skin. Each spider left its trail of red pain, as if tiny, hot needles had been pulled across the soft flesh.

Ah Sun's small eyes only appeared more sleepy. But his long fingernails wiggled inside the sleeve of his silken blouse. Evidently he was enjoying himself immensely.

"Now you will tell—"

"No! No! Kill me, but I'll never talk! I don't know! I don't—"

More little red spiders dribbled onto the fair skin, and Clara Chalmers screamed shrilly at last. But at that instant draperies parted. Three figures came through, or rather seemed to be catapulted into the den of old Ah Sun.

Two of the newcomers were Chinese. But the

third was the doll-like figure of Tiny Traeger. Tiny now appeared to be anything but doll-like, and not in the least pretty. Her small hands were flying in fighting fury and already her nails had removed patches of skin from the faces of her captors.

"Let me go, you dirty, yellow—"

Perhaps because Tiny had been reared as the grandchild of a veteran copper and was now the self-confessed sweetheart of another who was even more hard-boiled, it may be as well to omit the exact language employed by the raging, black-haired girl. Some of her own dress had been torn away, but the pair of Chinese were rapidly becoming undressed from the neck down.

Tiny used her nails and her fists, and her feet. One Chinese clamped a hand over her face, and it must be admitted that then she used her teeth.

"Subdue her!" commanded Ah Sun. "What manner of ancestors have you possessed that you should permit a mere child woman—"

Tiny had hold of one Chinaman's ear and she twisted it with a terrific, tearing hold. The yellow man squawked. Tiny tore herself free. Then she saw the half-stripped, white body of Clara Chalmers and the crawling red spiders.

The small girl sprang upon the two Chinese beside the bound girl. She sent the box containing the red spiders spinning across the room. She was kneeling, attempting to free the other tortured girl when the strong hands of one Chinaman caught her and forced her arms to her side.

"Bind her beside the other one!" came a command from Ah Sun. "It would seem there are many we do not know who have come upon our secret."

Cords were being whipped around the squirming body of Tiny when there came a queer clicking sound. A glowing light appeared in the vaulted ceiling of the den. It was in the form of a red half-moon with oddly pointed ends.

Ah Sun waved his longnailed hands quickly. There was not yet in the room any sound of the battle in the outside passage, of the coppers of Sergeant Thorsen hammering their way through heavy doors.

"Remove these troublesome persons while I receive honored visitors," said Ah Sun quietly. "Chang, you will bring all of the papers."

But the blind Sang Yoy was there and was quicker than Chang. He came from a corner bearing a carved teakwood box, lifting its lid. A sheaf of papers came into his metal-colored fingers and he extended these to Ah Sun, almost as if he could see clearly.

One Chinese was freeing Clara Chalmers, covering her seared, spider-bitten back with the torn remnant of her dress. Another lifted the light figure of Tiny Traeger. Ah Sun looked toward draperies at the end of the room.

AH SUN

Clara Chalmers screamed, but it was with sudden fright now rather than pain. A queerly hunched figure, his head and upper body concealed in a flowing hood and mask, came from behind the draperies. This man did not speak, but walked directly toward Ah Sun.

"You—"

Ah Sun no more than started to speak. The masked figure had looked at Clara Chalmers' white figure with strangely glowing eyes. He did not seem to lift a hand, but smoky flame burned through the front of his hood at the level of his waist. Blood reddened the yellow robe of old Ah Sun.

The skinny Chinese dope king died with his half-veiled eyes as open as they had been. They looked no more dead now than before, but the head sagged and Ah Sun's mouth remained open.

Fire charred a hole in the hooded robe of the masked man, then smoked out. His death weapon did not appear. He was leaping toward the slumped figure of Ah Sun. But it was the blind Sang Yoy who acted more swiftly, as if the uncanny eyes of his mind could view each event.

The metal fingers snatched the thin sheaf of papers he had been giving to the murdered Ah Sun. An open brazier of coals sat where it had perhaps warmed the scrawny shanks of the dead dope king. Sang Yoy's hand pushed the papers into these coals, his pock-marked face lacking all expression as the fire burned his skin.

There was a muttered oath from the hooded figure, as he plunged toward the hot brazier. But Clara Chalmers cried out again. One of the Chinese had torn one of her ankle bindings roughly loose. The masked slayer pivoted. The front of his robe smoked again, and the Chinese beside the pale-

faced girl dropped to his knees with blood spouting from his throat.

Now there came the crashing and shouting of Sergeant Thorsen's coppers smashing into Ah Sun's Den of Dreams. Acting on orders, the police were employing clubbed revolvers, the barrels of the machine guns and the helves of the axes, clearing out the scuttling, yellow rats.

The doll-like Tiny Traeger had been held firmly during the few seconds of the murder. It was now that the masked killer seized the soft body of Clara Chalmers in arms that reached from under his robe. He was lifting her, starting to move back toward the draperies from which he had emerged.

THE WHISPERER and old Quick Trigger burst into the room. Their Chinese disguises had been partly removed in the battle outside. The yellow man holding Tiny Traeger evidently imagined he could keep back the invaders with a threat, for he was suddenly holding a dagger point against the white throat of Tiny.

The Whisperer's awful, eerie voice filled the space of the vaulted den. This weird whisper was joined by the deadly hissing of one of his modern automatics. The Chinese with the dagger fell across Tiny's twisting body and his breath went out with a loud sighing. Tiny pulled herself free.

Now Tiny did not know Wildcat Gordon as The Whisperer. But she did know the queer D. Smith as a friend of Quick Trigger's. So The Whisperer was now beside her.

"Get out of here quickly!" he instructed. "Go to a hotel and stay away from Quick Trigger's penthouse tonight. I have seen Wildcat Gordon, and he fears there may be trouble there."

But Tiny was crying out, looking at swaying draperies. She saw old Quick Trigger springing after the masked murderer who carried Clara Chalmers so easily in his arms. Quick Trigger may have been in his sixties, but he packed a mule's kick in each bony fist. One bunch of knuckles clipped the abductor of the pale-faced girl at the base of the skull.

That blow was sufficient. The masked killer plunged on through the draperies, dropping Clara Chalmers to the rug.

Tiny's sharp eyes caught a silver mesh bag falling from the other girl's dress. She darted forward, pouncing upon it. Just at that moment all the lights in the place went out. There remained only the glowing of the red coals in the brazier.

"Take Clara Chalmers out, Quick Trigger!" came The Whisperer's command. "Tiny, follow your grandfather!"

There was fighting now in the doors of Ah Sun's den. The blind Sang Yoy had fallen at the feet of his master. The Whisperer snatched the sheaf of charred papers from the coals. They were mostly destroyed. He thrust all that remained into one of his pockets.

The red half-moon had ceased to glow in the vaulted ceiling. The Whisperer shot a pencil of light over Ah Sun's yellow features.

One loose sleeve had fallen back. The angry scar of a half-moon appeared on Ah Sun's left forearm, just below the elbow. Its swollen line proved it had not been there long. The Whisperer knew then that Ah Sun had been one whose flesh had been burned the night before.

Then who had been the killer, and why?

The Whisperer fingered the charred papers in his pocket. These must have been sought by someone. They must wait.

THE WHISPERER snapped off his light, speaking to find Tiny Traeger. He received no reply. With the other girl's silver purse in her dress, Tiny was making her way through a space where a street door showed the clean outside night.

It was not remarkable that Tiny managed to slip through the street, for all the Chinese for blocks around had disappeared into their holes. They wanted no part of this inexplicable raid of the police upon the place of Ah Sun. Strangely, already the word was passing around China Hill.

"Ah Sun is dead!"

Tiny found her parked roadster undamaged. She got off the Hill and at the first lighted place she emptied the contents of Clara Chalmers' purse. There were cards telling the girl's name. There was also a letter. A part of this said:

> And when you arrive, I will arrange to have a maid for you. I have advertised.

The letterhead showed the name of Arthur Chalmers. The address was Box 10, Jersey Road.

Tiny Traeger adjusted her torn dress. In the next few minutes, she was driving furiously toward Quick Trigger's penthouse. There might be danger there, but Tiny had the sudden idea she must have more clothes. Perhaps the kind of dresses worn by a lady's maid. She was sure that Clara Chalmers had not been given time to see her face back in Ah Sun's den.

Tiny had a plan working in her mind.

The raiding of the police on Ah Sun's Den of Dreams had convinced her that Wildcat had raided it with a definite purpose. And perhaps that purpose indirectly concerned the daughter of Arthur Chalmers. If so, Tiny intended to help Wildcat all she could. Posing as a maid, she could enter the Chalmers home and keep her ears and eyes open. Anything that might be of help, she would relay to Wildcat or Quick Trigger.

In the meantime, Quick Trigger had placed Clara Chalmers in one of The Whisperer's coupés. Then he had flashed back to Ah Sun's den. He met The Whisperer coming out. But the masked killer who had attempted to abduct Clara Chalmers had disappeared. The police were rounding up the Chinese, trying to check on the killing of old Ah Sun, but without much success.

CHAPTER IX
ONE ON BRIAN BORU

WHEN The Whisperer and Quick Trigger drove off China Hill, they had Clara Chalmers in the coupé with them. The police cleanup had been completed. If Sergeant Thorsen was in the least puzzled at the absence of Commissioner Wildcat Gordon during the strangely ordered raid, he never batted an eye.

Sergeant Tom Thorsen had never been taken into the secret of The Whisperer. But there were times when the wooden-faced sergeant must have suspected a great deal more than he ever divulged. Just now, he was busy explaining to Deputy Henry Bolton how the raid had been ordered by Wildcat himself, and how they had come upon the murder of old Ah Sun.

"And," said one of the detectives suddenly, "we heard The Whisperer in Ah Sun's den just before we found the old Chinaman and the others dead in there."

"The Whisperer?" rapped out Deputy Bolton. "Again? And he was in on the killin' of one of our men at Royal Campano's penthouse! Dammitall! It may be that this hunchbacked Campano was—or is—The Whisperer, and he may not have been murdered! Why should Commissioner Gordon order a raid before a murder when The Whisperer was—"

"That's exactly it, Deputy Bolton," interrupted Sergeant Thorsen. "I guess the chief had a tipoff that The Whisperer was after Ah Sun, and he wanted us to nail him."

"What's this?" demanded a pompous voice,

Mayor Van Royston came striding from a car. The tall Arthur Chalmers walked beside him.

Deputy Bolton started to explain.

"But what has become of Mr. Chalmers' daughter?" exploded Mayor Van Royston. "You say, Sergeant Thorsen, that Wildcat Gordon told you she would be found in Ah Sun's den?"

The tall Chalmers rubbed a big hand wearily across his eyes and groaned.

"Great grief, Mayor Van Royston," he exclaimed. "She must have followed me tonight! Don't tell me she has—"

"I believe she was taken away, Mr. Chalmers," stated Sergeant Thorsen unhappily. "There was evidence that a girl had been in Ah Sun's den and had been carried out."

"Mayor Van Royston!" boomed the big Chalmers. "If my daughter is not found alive, I will personally see that Wildcat Gordon and his whole police department is put out of power!"

Though his face was of the farmer type, the strong, massive jaw of Chalmers and the dangerous glint in his blue-gray eyes seemed evidence that he would carry out anything that he undertook.

"I'll have Wildcat Gordon on the carpet inside an hour!" promised Mayor Van Royston. "Since that Campano murder, we have not been able to find him, though he issued telephoned orders tonight for this raid! Sergeant Thorsen, Deputy Bolton, have all details ordered to find Commissioner Gordon! Bring him to headquarters, if it is necessary to employ force!"

The small eyes of Deputy Bolton gleamed. This was his dish. The wooden face of Sergeant Thorsen showed no emotion. Perhaps he was thinking of the amount of force required to transfer the fighting Wildcat Gordon from one spot to another.

BUT as this conversation was taking place, and Arthur Chalmers was having a checkup started in the vain hope of finding his missing daughter, all the fight had temporarily oozed out of Wildcat Gordon, or rather The Whisperer, as he now appeared.

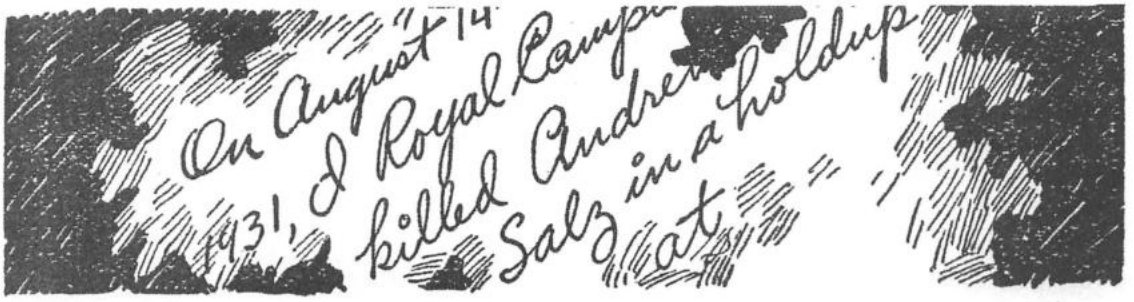
The reason for The Whisperer's sudden sense of failure was the black Scottish terrier. For Brian Boru was lying on the floor of a loft building hideout. Clara Chalmers was unconscious upon a sagging bed. But the other figure that had been on that same bed, in that hideout, guarded by the vicious and dependable Brian Boru, was no longer there.

The Whisperer had brought Clara Chalmers directly to the place where he had left Deuce Dimon, in the firm belief that no man lived who could outwit and escape from the white-fanged dog. But Deuce Dimon was gone. There was no evidence of his having struggled with Brian Boru, or that the usually implacable terrier had made any effort to hold the prisoner.

Brian Boru lay on the floor as if he were dead. But the dog's eyes were alive and rolled. When The Whisperer touched him, he found the dog's body was stiffened. Yet there was no evidence of poisoning. The terrier seemed to be held in some sort of trance.

When The Whisperer spoke, Brian Boru did not respond. He lay rigidly on the floor, as if he were still guarding the prisoner who had been placed on the bed. It was old Quirk Trigger who examined the dog and rubbed one hand thoughtfully over his shining bald head.

"Deuce Dimon, huh?" he grunted. "Now what was it I heard about Dimon some years back? That's it, Wildcat. I've got it! That dog ain't poisoned an'



he hasn't been hurt! Damn, he's hypnotized."

The Whisperer shook his head, but he was compelled to believe. Quick Trigger told of Deuce Dimon once having posed in a sideshow as a magician, a fakir from India.

"They said Dimon could make a snake lie down and roll over," said Quick Trigger. "Some of the boys have thought he had more brains than Royal Campano himself, and that he controlled him in some funny way."

It was incredible, yet it seemed to be true. Coming to his senses, the mysterious Deuce Dimon had without doubt never moved from the bed until he had Brian Boru under the control of his staring eyes. No force had been employed, and The Whisperer had made sure that Deuce Dimon had no weapon.

Then Quick Trigger had another sudden idea.

"Now I know who killed old Ah Sun!" he exploded. "Deuce Dimon! It could have been none other! The way I figure it, Campano an' Dimon were in with Ah Sun on a racket combination an'—"

"HELLAMIGHTY!" chuckled The Whisperer hoarsely. "You've got to see that Clara Chalmers gets safely home, Quick Trigger! But first, we will see what's left here. The masked man who killed Ah Sun was after some papers, so he was—"

The Whisperer produced the charred bits of paper taken from the brazier. He was thinking fast. He had not at first believed Royal Campano to have been murdered. At least, he had been convinced that Dude Kellow was not the killer he had been framed to appear.

Now he had a more startling thought. Could Deuce Dimon have engineered the frame-up? Was Campano really dead, and had Deuce Dimon been making a move to take over whatever crime organization had been formed? The pieces of that theory seemed to fit together very well.

Then The Whisperer was swearing softly. But one part of one of the papers had been uncharred. Nothing could be discovered in the rest of the scorched ashes. This scrap of paper was spread out. There were a few words inked upon it.

On August 4, 1931, I, with Royal Campano, killed Andrew Saltz in a holdup at—

These were the only legible words.

There was no name signed, but there was a deeply smudged print. It was a thumbprint. The Whisperer stared at it, and was wondering if it might check with anything at headquarters.

But old Quick Trigger was peering intently. For years, he had been a police deputy. It was said that he could remember whorl for whorl and line for line most of the fingerprints he had ever seen. Now he held the smudged thumbprint up to the light. Perhaps it was the tiny, triangular mark of a scar that appeared in the middle of it that fixed his amazing conclusion.

"Rafe Barton! Sure as sin! The Feds an' our own cops have been after him for months, an' got no place! He's got a jewelry shop down in the Harley neighborhood, an' it's open-and-shut that he's behind the loan racket! But try an' pin somethin' on him! He's the—"

"You will see to it that Clara Chalmers reaches her home, Quick Trigger," interrupted The Whisperer. "You have always fussed around with flowers and know the lingo. This Chalmers is developing new species, I hear. You will get a job with him, and you will take Dude Kellow with you as your assistant. Put up some talk of knowing a new species you can produce, and that will get Chalmers—"

THE WHISPERER placed Brian Boru where he would be cared for. It was shortly before daylight when Clara Chalmers was returned to her home on Jersey Road. Her father was at this time still with Mayor Van Royston at police headquarters, anxiously awaiting reports from the police who had discovered no trace of the girl.

And it was just after dawn that a bearded old man in overalls and a younger man arrived at the Arthur Chalmers' flower farm and applied to the head gardener for jobs. The old man was Quick Trigger. The younger man was Dude Kellow, but so changed that none would ever have recognized him.

For Quick Trigger had worked a marvel of disguise. Kellow was still puzzled as to all that had happened to him, but he was beginning to recall something of a man named Camp having offered him a job on a boat. Now Kellow's head was closely shaved, shells had changed the color of his eyes,

and bits of gum had altered the contour of his face.

If Royal Campano himself had met Dude Kellow at this moment, he would have found no identifying mark upon him.

At about this same time, Tiny Traeger was walking to the Chalmers' farm from an early bus. She held a newspaper clipping in her hand. She was about to apply for the position of maid to the recently returned Clara Chalmers.

Arthur Chalmers himself would have been amazed at this series of events, just as he was to be amazed a little later by the announcement of his daughter's safety, and her almost complete loss of memory as to what had happened during the terrible night.

But at daylight, Chalmers was pacing the office of Wildcat Gordon. His friend, Mayor Van Royston, had remained with him. Both showed the effect of the sleepless, worried night.

Deputy Henry Bolton was gloating over some bits of information he had managed to collect around the murder of old Ah Sun.

"I tell you, the old Chink was doin' more than runnin' dope," stated Deputy Bolton. "He was puttin' up money on some other rackets. He has been responsible for runnin' in more Chinese than any other man, and he was mixed up with a mug we're goin' to grab soon. It's that Rafe Barton who puts out the phony contracts on jewelry and then bleeds workingmen."

Mayor Van Royston flared.

"Why hasn't Commissioner Gordon found out some of these things?" he exploded. "When anything really breaks, he keeps out of—"

"That's right, your honor!"cracked a crisp voice. "I keep out of everything until something cracks on the inside! Maybe Henry might want to run down to the Harley neighborhood and pinch Rafe Barton, and ball up the works! You wouldn't have a thing on him!"

Wildcat Gordon strode across to his desk from the outer door. His new serge suit was violently blue, and his necktie was red. He fingered a bright carnation in his coat lapel and looked at Arthur Chalmers. It would have seemed that the jaunty Wildcat had just come from some rest cure instead of hours of nerve-tearing adventure.

"Why, you—"

Arthur Chalmers no doubt was mad. His big chin quivered. He walked over and waved a fist under Wildcat's chin. It seemed as if he was on the verge of hitting the cocky commissioner who peered up at him from under the brim of a new army hat.

"Know how you feel, Chalmers," said Wildcat quietly. "But I just learned that your daughter has been mysteriously returned home safely. I had a tip early tonight, or last night, that this crook The Whisperer was prowling on China Hill. Then a couple of Chinese were seen to take a girl answering your daughter's description into Ah Sun's Den of Dreams. I put two and two together, and ordered a raid. Then I was detained—"

"You were detained?" squealed Mayor Van Royston, poking out his chest. "The Whisperer has killed a policeman, probably murdered Ah Sun and no doubt he kidnapped Miss Chalmers, and you were detained! Perhaps you will be telling us you have been following up the Royal Campano murder, which was all cleared up when that Dude Kellow was found!"

"Now that's an idea, your honor," said Wildcat cheerfully, at the same time puffing vile smoke from a stubby pipe. "Henry, have you found out anymore about Campano's murder?"

Deputy Bolton glared at Wildcat and remained speechless.

"As for the Ah Sun killing, Mayor Van Royston," said Wildcat, "the next time you go slumming, I'd advise taking along two better coppers. I have a suspicion that The Whisperer was in the Den of Dreams while you and your friend, Chalmers, were seeing the sights."

MAYOR VAN ROYSTON almost choked. Chalmers was on a telephone. The big man's eyes had cleared, and great relief had come into his face.

"I've got to get out to my place," he stated, replacing the receiver. "Commissioner Gordon, I apologize. My daughter is about all I have left in life, and I have been excited. Will you detail some of your men to watch after her for a few days, until the matter of some extortion is cleaned up?"

Wildcat flicked a petal from his carnation.

"I have already assigned men to that little job, Chalmers," he stated. "If I am not mistaken, they are now working among the gardeners on your place. It would be best that they remain unidentified for a time."

"By jove!" boomed Chalmers, holding out his hand. "I guess I have made a mistake, commissioner! Wish you'd drop in on me soon! I'd like to show you my new roses! They will be the feature of the Palace Show this year."

"I might do that little thing," said Wildcat. "But just now I have other business."

Mayor Van Royston then mumbled, "Other business?"

"Sure, I'm going to find the body of Royal Campano," said Wildcat.

CHAPTER X
THE STRANGE HINDU

WILDCAT GORDON meant what he said. He

was about to follow a new and startling angle in his quest for the "murdered" Royal Campano. So, as the humble, gray Whisperer, an inconspicuous man, but apparently a factory worker, he went down into the Harley neighborhood.

This was an industrial district. It was in this vicinity that it was reported "Rafe" Barton, sleek jewelry racketeer, worked his crooked game.

In the meantime, Arthur Chalmers looked swiftly over the gardeners amid workingmen on his big flower farm. He was quick enough to identify Quick Trigger and Dude Kellow as new men.

Wildcat Gordon had told him he was sending guards for his daughter.

Work on the drainage of a stretch of swamp had been stopped because of an extortion demand upon the contract. Chalmers stared in amazement when he saw that the drainage job was going ahead. Jon Stevens, the contractor, nodded and said, "I guess things have been fixed up. I've put on some new men and received word there will be no payoff."

Arthur Chalmers looked over the men working in the ditches. A raggedly clothed laborer with a Hindu turban around his head and earrings dangling was bent over a shovel. He was one of the new men employed. Fuzzy, black beard concealed the lower half of his face.

Clara Chalmers did not remember having seen Tiny Traeger in Ah Sun's den. In fact, the pale-faced girl from the convent seemed to have been put into a strange trance by the terrible experience through which she had been. When her father held her in his arms and attempted to question her, Clara only stared at him and murmured.

"I like my new maid, for she is pretty and quick," was what the girl said.

The keen gray-blue eyes of Chalmers took in Tiny Traeger moving about the room.

"She is pretty and quick, daughter," he said, "But what happened to you last night?"

The pale-faced girl shook her head slowly. Her hazel eyes had a fixed look, as if she was seeing someone who was not present.

"Last night? Why, I was home, I waited for you, father. Then I fell asleep. When I awoke, my new maid was in the act of bathing my face. Her name is—"

"Mary," said Tiny quickly. "She was sleeping, Mr. Chalmers, and seemed ill. So I bathed her face. I came to inquire about the job of maid and—"

"You have the job," interrupted Chalmers hoarsely, "if you can only do something! I must send for a doctor!"

"I am not ill, father," said Clara unexpectedly. "I will not have a doctor. I will not see one if he comes."

CHALMERS was swearing under his breath. He studied Tiny Traeger. Perhaps he was thinking of the men Wildcat Gordon had sent. Could Wildcat Gordon have also included this girl who had so unexpectedly walked into the position of maid to his daughter?

The farmer's massive jaw was hard and set like granite. He suddenly passed one big hand swiftly across his daughter's eyes. The girl did not seem to notice the gesture.

"I will go among the flowers and walk," said Clara, as if repeating the words of some lesson. "Mary will go with me. I will not have a doctor, father."

But Chalmers drew Tiny Traeger to one side roughly. He looked into her bright, blue eyes.

"Was my daughter in the house alone when you came?" he demanded. "And was she like that?"

"She was in the house alone, Mr. Chalmers," stated Tiny truthfully. "And she was like that when I awakened her. Shall I walk with her now?"

"Yes! Yes!" snapped Chalmers. "Don't leave her for an instant! You will be well paid! I imagine you came from the police, but you do not have to tell me!"

It was well that Tiny had the training instilled by Quick Trigger and Wildcat Gordon. She betrayed no surprise, and she said nothing. Having come to the farm on her own initiative, Tiny was amazed at Chalmers thinking she had come from the police. She did not know of Chalmers' contact with Wildcat.

Tiny followed the other girl along a garden path quickly. She knew that Chalmers was looking after her intently. There was suffering in the big man's face. Plainly, he was gravely disturbed over his daughter's condition. Profane imprecations rolled from his lips.

Old Quick Trigger, already working in the garden with Dude Kellow, was another who swore roughly to himself when he saw his amazing granddaughter, Tiny, walking with Clara Chalmers. He had not known Tiny was here. There were several persons thinking at cross-purposes on the Chalmers farm this morning.

One thing Tiny had not told Arthur Chalmers was that when she had arrived at the house, the window of his daughter's room had been open. The girl had been lying on the floor. There had been evidence that someone had been in the room when Clara Chalmers reached home, and that same person had hurriedly departed as Tiny arrived. Tiny had been and was still as puzzled as Arthur Chalmers appeared to be. Having witnessed the torture of the red spiders in Ah Sun's den, Tiny believed it possible the other girl's condition might be the result of that terrible experience. She had not been quick enough to see who had been in the room with the girl and had gone from the window, vanishing in the shrubbery.

Over in the drainage ditch, faithfully wielding a shovel, the fuzzy-bearded Hindu with the earrings and the turban lifted his head as the two girls walked by in the garden not far away. There was a slow, hard smile across the Hindu's face and a fixed, staring deepness in his dark eyes.

When the girls had passed from view, the Hindu laborer fished a bit of torn paper from his ragged clothing. This contained only part of a word. It was the scrap of a letter that Deuce Dimon had found in the room of Royal Campano before Campano had "gone for a ride."

IN the flower farmhouse, Arthur Chalmers twice went to the telephone as if to call a doctor. Each time he hesitated and went to the window, looking at the two girls walking in the garden. The man's iron-gray hair was rumpled, and his massive jaw was clenched.

Apparently Chalmers decided to humor his daughter for the time. He did not call a doctor, but went out and looked over the work on the drainage job. A little later, he was talking with his head gardener.

Old Quick Trigger was summoned.

"My gardener tells me," said Chalmers, "that you are interested in my new vari-colored roses, that you once experimented along the same lines?"

"That I did," lied Quick Trigger instantly. "You have crossed the two colors of red amid white, and there is a way to add a shade of blue. It would be a world beater; one of the greatest displays ever seen at the Palace."

Chalmers proved that, next to his daughter, his flowers were his greatest interest. He passed nearly an hour explaining his system of grafting roses to Quick Trigger. Then he ordered that Quick Trigger be kept at work on his prize experiment.

A little later, Mayor Van Royston appeared in a car at the farm gate. The mayor still showed the effects of sleeplessness.

"Is everything all right, Chalmers?" he inquired anxiously.

"Everything is all right, Mayor Van Royston," said the big man. "My daughter is home, and it is difficult to believe that anything happened last night. Fortunately, she does not seem to recall much about it."

Mayor Van Royston was greatly relieved. Chalmers had been his farm neighbor for a long time, and he liked the big man immensely. In fact, Chalmers was popular with all the flower estate owners in the vicinity of the Jersey Road.

That he did not mention his daughter's strange mental condition was but natural for a father. Perhaps Chalmers hoped the effect of the shock would quickly pass and his daughter would be restored to normal.

When he returned to the house, Chalmers once more summoned Tiny Traeger.

"Promise me not to leave my daughter alone one moment, night or day, and I will see that you are well rewarded," said Chalmers. "I am going into the city later and consult a specialist. Perhaps something can be done without my daughter being aware of it."

Tiny nodded. "I will stay closely by her, Mr. Chalmers."

Tiny had left Clara Chalmers in her room for only a few minutes at this time. She crossed the big hallway after talking with the girl's father. Perhaps it was instinct that caused Tiny to pause and listen before she opened the door of the other girl's room.

Then Tiny saw the palefaced Clara Chalmers. The girl had come into the broad hallway through another door. She was moving furtively along the wall, one hand held closely at her side. Her eyes were fixed straight ahead. Tiny saw the girl was creeping toward the door of her father's library which Tiny had just left.

Tiny sprang, swiftly, noiselessly after the strangely staring girl. She caught the gleam of metal in a fold of her dress just in time to fasten her own strong hands upon Clara Chalmers' wrist and twist suddenly, forcing the girl against the wall.

Queerly enough, Clara Chalmers uttered no protest, made no outcry. She stood looking at Tiny for a minute as if she had never seen her before. Tiny was holding a small automatic pistol in her hands. She saw that its magazine was fully loaded and the safety catch was off.

Clara Chalmers had been stealing toward her father's library!

Tiny had a queer sensation. She was prepared to force the other girl back into the other room, when Clara Chalmers said suddenly, "You are my maid, Mary, and you are pretty and quick. I dreamed I was—"

Then the girl's eyes closed, and she swayed. Tiny was small, but she managed to carry Clara back into her room and place her upon the bed.

Tiny bathed the girl's head, as she debated what she should do. Then she decided to speak with Chalmers and advise him to take some action. But as she started toward his library, a car roared out of the driveway, turning toward the city.

Tiny judged that Chalmers had acted upon his decision to see a specialist. She returned and sat beside the now quiet girl. Suddenly the bearded face of old Quick Trigger appeared at the open window.

For once, Tiny was willing to confide all that had taken place. And in a few minutes more, Quick Trigger was making an effort to contact Wildcat Gordon by a telephone. But several hours were to pass before Wildcat was to be informed of the strange case of Clara Chalmers.

AT this time, the gray Whisperer had apparently come from a factory. He was standing at the bar of a corner saloon, and a slickly dressed young man was talking with him. The young man was displaying a cheap wristwatch, the type worn by a woman.

"But your wife will want it the minute she sees it," said the young man.

"I have no money now, none until payday," said The Whisperer's husky voice. "Maybe if you see me then—"

The young man laughed and said, "Here, you just take it along to show her tonight. If she doesn't like it, you can return it to this address tomorrow evening, after work. All you do is sign this receipt, and I'll trust you."

It was a strange transaction for the big town, but one that was common enough. The young man extended a folded paper, pointed to a line. The Whisperer appeared to hesitate, but finally consented and scrawled "D. Smith" on the folded paper. Then he thrust the wristwatch into a pocket.

The address given for the return of the wristwatch brought a ghostly chuckle to The Whisperer's tight lips. He was aware that hundreds of other workingmen had signed similar receipts for watches and other articles of jewelry in the past few months. Smiling young men had "trusted" them to return the stuff. But first these jewelry salesmen had learned about the workmen and how much they needed their jobs.

The Whisperer had arranged his own contact through a factory owner. So when he signed the name D. Smith, he was fully aware that on the following evening he was to meet none other than Rafe Barton, head of the jewelry loan racket.

With the watch in his pocket, The Whisperer decided to push the time ahead for his interview with Rafe Barton. Tomorrow evening he would be expected. This evening he would not.

Shadows were coming down on the narrow street canyons when The Whisperer reached a telephone booth. He removed the dental plate from his mouth. It was Wildcat Gordon's crisp voice that reached Sergeant Thorsen at headquarters.

"Have a squad at Rafe Barton's office in one hour!" instructed Wildcat. "After you hear some trouble there, wait a minute or two, then rush the place and take a paper and a wristwatch you will find in Rafe Barton's hand."

"Right, chief," said Sergeant Thorsen. "But will Barton—"

"Rafe Barton probably will be feeling very bad and won't make any resistance," stated Wildcat. "You will take him to the old Seventy-ninth Precinct station and hold him there! Later, we may produce a workman who beat him up over this jewelry deal! Or we may work on him privately!"

The Whisperer replaced the dental plate that changed the contour of his face. He went out into the street and moved along in the shadows. Half an hour later, he passed up an elevator that led to the upper floor of an office building.

None saw the gray figure gliding silently up the stairway. The Whisperer paused before a door that showed a light behind it.

CHAPTER XI
THE LOAN RACKET MURDER

RAFE BARTON was a big, ruddy man with small, pale eyes. He stood behind a counter, inside a brass-grilled window. His office was ornately fitted and displayed many cases of cheap jewelry. A big safe was opened behind the counter. At this moment there was no other person in the outer office of the jeweler.

The Whisperer crossed from the corridor door hesitatingly. He pulled a wristwatch from a packet and laid it in front of Rafe Barton.

"Humph! What's this?"

Barton peered at the cheap watch and into the face of the gray man. He could see that his visitor's clothes were marked with oil from a factory.

The Whisperer spoke huskily.

"My wife don't want this watch, and so I brought it back like your man said to do," he stated, "My name is D. Smith, and I signed a receipt."

Barton's pale eyes glittered with amusement. He paused, as if trying to recall something.

"A receipt, Mr. Smith?" he said sharply. "You must have made a mistake! One of my men sold you a watch only this afternoon! Let's see, I think you promised to pay a hundred dollars at—"

"No, sir," said The Whisperer quickly. "The man said I was to bring it back, and he would trust me to—"

"That's a likely story, Mr. Smith!" snapped Barton. "Trust you or anyone else with a hundred-dollar watch? You're crazy! Here's the contract."

The Whisperer was looking at the "receipt" he had signed. He knew what the paper would show. He had signed a purchase contract for one hundred dollars, calling for ten dollars weekly from his pay. The contract stated explicitly all the terms. Such folded papers had been signed by many workingmen.

The Whisperer's grayish face looked bewildered. He protested that he had not intended to purchase the watch. He said he could not afford it.

The pale-eyed Barton suddenly seemed to become good-humored.

"I can't do much about the mistake you made, Mr. Smith," he said pleasantly. "But while you cannot return the watch, I can make you much better terms, if you will pay a little interest. I do that

sometimes as a favor, and I'll bet your wife will be pleased. I'll fix up another paper, and you only have to pay two dollars a week. Now how's that?"

The gray workman coughed and hesitated. He picked up the wristwatch and weighed it in his hand.

"Well maybe that way, but I don't know," he said slowly. "Yes, I guess I could do that. The wife would like the watch."

Barton's pale eyes smiled. He slid another paper through the grilled window. The Whisperer peered at it nearsightedly with his colorless eyes. He could see where it specified that he was to pay two dollars weekly for a watch. It mentioned "reasonable interest."

The Whisperer picked up the pen that Barton extended. He bent close over the paper. But as Barton had moved, The Whisperer had made a swift note that the jeweler was using his right hand only. He was holding his left arm stiffly at his side, as if it were tightly bound.

Now The Whisperer's quick eyes caught another part of the paper. It was in the smallest of type. That paragraph informed him that any one signing this paper was actually contracting to pay Rafe Barton the sum of three hundred dollars, with the alternative of having his weekly pay garnisheed in event of failure to meet payments.

It had not been intended that the prospective purchaser should see that paragraph. Because of the perfect legality of such papers, the police had never been able to convict those conducting the racket. The watch that lay under The Whisperer's hand was worth possibly ten dollars.

"You mean sign it here, mister?" said The Whisperer, peering at the paper as if he could not understand the lines.

"Sure," said Barton, leaning forward. "Right there on that—"

THE jeweler leaned forward, his ruddy face directly over the paper. One tenth of a second later, the ten dollar watch was not worth ten cents. The Whisperer's left fist shot up with the watch doubled between his fingers. The case and works of the watch smashed on Barton's teeth, cutting his lips.

The jewelry loan racketeer squawked an oath, started to jerk back. But fingers as irresistible as steel claws closed upon his thick neck. Barton's body was jerked forward. The Whisperer's fist smashed his face again as the man's body caught the brass grillework of the window and ripped it loose.

The watch tinkled to the floor in broken parts. Barton let out a loud yell. An alarm bell started ringing loudly in the back part of the office. The Whisperer whirled the jeweler over his shoulder and slammed his body to the floor with terrific force as two men came jamming through an inner doorway.

One man was holding a revolver and would have snapped a shot, but The Whisperer crouched suddenly behind Barton. The two men started circling, and The Whisperer sprang from his toes upon the man with the gun.

The revolver exploded, but the man discharging it was being jammed into the steel door of the safe at the moment, and the bullet whined off the ceiling.

A weapon cracked down across The Whisperer's neck, jarring him to one side. He went to his hands and knees and had a glimpse of the blackjack being swung again. He shot one heel back into the man's stomach with a force that seemed to double the fellow into two parts.

Rafe Barton was slowly getting to his feet then. The Whisperer had no time to be ethical. He was partly on the floor himself, and he used his toe with a swinging punch. Barton sank down with a grunt that proved he would be out for some time. The foot had struck him on the angle of his jaw.

The man who had had the revolver was out cold and wedged in between the broken counter and the safe. The one who had been kicked in the stomach would stay where he was for some time to come.

The Whisperer arose, flicked the light switch and listened. He had timed it so that Sergeant Thorsen and his men should have been coming into the building at about this time. Sergeant Thorsen no doubt would arrest all three men and take them to the old Seventy-ninth Precinct station. The Whisperer left the contract papers and the broken watch. He had instructed Sergeant Thorsen to bring this bit of evidence along.

Except for Rafe Barton's jewelry loan office, there appeared to be no other room now occupied on this floor. Barton kept open later than others because of his evening customers. The Whisperer had marked the position of the fire escape leading from the end of the corridor down into the alleyway.

He opened the outer door cautiously and listened. There was no evidence yet of the detective squad. Then The Whisperer heard shuffling feet. Someone with a light, quick tread was coming from the direction of the stairway.

This was not a position desirable for The Whisperer should some other workingman arrive on business.

Because of the evening vacancy of the other offices, it was apparent that the mêlée in the Barton place had not been heard. The Whisperer went through the rear window of the corridor and swiftly down the fire escape. He swung and dropped into the alleyway.

If The Whisperer had delayed a few seconds, he would have seen that the newcomer in the corridor had none of the marks of a workingman. He was a quick, scuttling figure. When he came to the door

of Rafe Barton's office, he listened intently. He must have been satisfied, for he opened the door and went in.

IN the meantime, Sergeant Tom Thorsen had been uttering silent oaths. The right-hand man of Wildcat Gordon had timed his raid upon the Rafe Barton offices to the minute, as he had been directed. But as his car had swung into the block, another police car came around the corner.

Deputy Henry Bolton stepped from the second car. Bolton had been on an extension in the head-

Barton let out a yell as his body caught the brass grillework of the window and ripped it loose.

quarters office when part of the order had been given for the seizing of Rafe Barton. Instead of interfering with the order, Deputy Bolton had decided to be upon the scene personally.

Sergeant Thorsen was coldly furious, but he stalled for time. Several minutes were wasted, then Deputy Bolton took command of the situation.

"Wildcat Gordon has ordered the arrest of Rafe Barton," he said. "So we will go ahead and pinch Barton. I had been intendin' to do that, anyway. We know he was hooked up in the loan racket with Ah Sun."

Sergeant Thorsen could stall no longer. This was tough, because Wildcat had ordered Barton taken to the old Seventy-ninth Precinct station. With Deputy Bolton on the scene, Sergeant Thorsen had no intention of revealing any of Wildcat's private plans.

Six detectives were beside Deputy Bolton and Sergeant Thorsen as they started into the tall building. At that moment, an excited elevator operator came dashing toward the street.

"Police! Murder! Holdup!" he was bawling, at the top of his lungs.

To snapped questions, the operator's mouth gaped. Then he gulped, "All of 'em! All three of 'em! I heard somebody running—something whispered at me—and then I looked in and there they were—"

Even the hardest of Wildcat Gordon's dicks grew a little sick when they went into the Barton jewelry office. Rafe Barton lay on the floor before his counter. His skull had been smashed to a pulp. His two clerks were both dead. Apparently all had been hammered lifeless with a heavy piece of the broken grillework from the brass window.

"The Whisperer again!" roared Deputy Bolton "That punk heard him! He has busted the safe wide open and—what's this?"

Sergeant Thorsen was looking at the same thing with emotionless eyes. The dead Rafe Barton's shirt had been ripped off his left arm. A swollen, angry hall-moon burn showed just below his elbow. There were no such marks on the arms of the clerks.

The Whisperer had not even paused to look for that half-moon burn on Rafe Barton's arm. He had known it was there, for Barton had used only his right hand.

Another of the Half-Moon Brotherhood of murderers was dead.

"Don't touch that safe!" bawled Deputy Bolton. "The Whisperer had found out somethin' about Ah Sun and Barton, and he's been usin' it to rib them!"

At a glance, it appeared the motive of the murders might have been robbery. For the steel doors of the safe were open Three steel boxes inside had been forced open and their contents spilled. But it was the quiet, smart Sergeant Thorsen who was the first to ascertain there had been no robbery in the ordinary sense.

For currency and jewelry lay spilled upon the floor, making up a considerable amount. But it was apparent that papers of some kind had been removed from one of the boxes. Had The Whisperer been here at this moment, he would have known instantly that the same hand had killed both Ah Sun and Rafe Barton.

While Deputy Bolton roared orders and the other dicks were performing the necessary activities ahead of the homicide men, already on their way, Sergeant Thorsen had been doing his own investigating. One folded paper had fallen to the floor. Sergeant Thorsen glanced at this paper, whistled softly and concealed it.

It was Sergeant Thorsen who likewise found the "receipt contract" signed by D. Smith, and slipped it from view. If he suspected that Wildcat Gordon was The Whisperer, he never batted an eye. But there was one fact of which the detective sergeant was convinced:

The Whisperer had not been the murderer. Thorsen's keen, cold eyes marked the fist and heel bruises on Barton's swollen face. He was convinced that Barton and the others had been only knocked out, and that the killer had been lurking nearby when it happened.

MAYOR VAN ROYSTON was in the headquarters office, strutting and wild-eyed, as Deputy Bolton made his report of the Barton murders an hour later.

"It's The Whisperer again," announced Deputy Bolton.

"Of course, I'm only the mayor," said Van Royston, with cold sarcasm, "but might I presume to inquire where Wildcat Gordon may be, or where he was during the raid he ordered? Wildcat ordered the raid on Ah Sun's place, and there was the same kind of murder. Where is Gordon now, I want to know?"

"Unavoidably detained, your honor," said the cold, crisp voice of Wildcat, as he pushed open the door of the office. "Met your friend, Chalmers. We were having a little confab when the newspaper extras hit the street about the Rafe Barton murder."

The gray-haired flower farmer strode in beside Wildcat. His massive face held lines of anxiety, which were possibly caused mostly by the condition of his daughter at home. But he had other worries.

"That's right, Mayor Van Royston," said Chalmers. "Jon Stevens, the contractor on my drainage job, put his men back to work today. Then, later, he reports to me that he is forced to add ten thousand to the contract price to take care of the extortion racket, or face more killings."

Mayor Van Royston was partly placated by the presence of Chalmers with Wildcat Gordon, but he persisted, "This Barton raid—that Ah Sun raid—then the two murders, Commissioner Gordon. It begins to seem as—if you are putting the police into the homicide business. How does it—"

Wildcat interrupted with cold precision.

"If I was good enough to order more murders like the Ah Sun and the Rafe Barton cases, damned if I wouldn't feel I was an asset to society. It happens that a workingman complained to me that Barton was robbing him on a garnishee racket, and he was to be in Barton's office when Sergeant Thorsen and his men appeared. In fact, this fellow said he planned to go up there and beat hell out of Barton, and then my men could have him."

"So, you know the murderer this time," snapped Mayor Van Royston. "Well, who is he? Why hasn't he been brought in?"

"That happens to be my affair," said Wildcat calmly. "Anyway, my man didn't go to Barton's office and I would have called off the arrest, but Sergeant Thorsen and his men were already on their way over there."

CHAPTER XII
CAN A DEAD MAN KILL?

"Do you think this Jon Stevens is strictly on the up and up, Chalmers?" questioned Wildcat Gordon a little later.

"Known him for years," stated Chalmers, and Mayor Van Royston added, "Jon Stevens has worked on my farm place, and he has always been on the square."

"Anyone among his men who might be hooked up with the racket?" questioned Wildcat. "The boys usually have somebody playing close to the boss where there's a touch."

Arthur Chalmers frowned heavily. It appeared as if he might be about to speak of his more personal trouble, but he shook his head. He said he believed Jon Stevens would stand behind any man he employed.

Wildcat inquired where Jon Stevens might be found. Chalmers said he was upstate tonight, but that he usually worked late at his office over the line.

"If you happen to want a talk with him, Commissioner Gordon, I could tell him and—"

"I'm never quite sure where I'll be," stated Wildcat, with an amused side glance at Mayor Van Royston. "His honor will tell you that much."

The mayor glared at Wildcat and sputtered, "I'm not clear yet about these murders, and the newspapers are beginning to say—"

"—That a nice, new commissioner would be handy for the reform party at the next election," cut in Wildcat. "But there are murders and murders. I'll lie awake nights when this Half-Moon crowd begins picking on outsiders. For the present, perhaps the crime wave is killing itself off. I'll look into the extortion matter, Chalmers, but I can't say exactly when."

A few minutes later, Sergeant Thorsen was in a private office with Wildcat. The wooden-faced officer had permitted Deputy Bolton to make all of the murder report to Mayor Van Royston. He had not spoken of the two papers which he now laid before Wildcat. One of these was the jewelry racket contract signed by D. Smith; Wildcat placed this away without comment.

He spread the other paper from Rafe Barton's safe before him. It would seem that the murdered Rafe Barton at least had been making sure of having evidence against others of the Half-Moon Brotherhood in combined form.

SEVEN blackly smudged thumbprints showed across the paper. Under each of these was a name. With the names came designations that made clear one of the most daring attempts ever seen to bring separate rackets under one controlling head. And there could be no doubt but that racket king had been Royal Campano.

The names set down were:

Royal Campano (his thumbprint)
Ah Sun (dope)
Barton (jewels)
Smithers (blackmail)
Scabro (alien)
Robon (city contracts)
Ranahan (construction)

Never before had such definite evidence been placed in the hands of the police. Not that Wildcat Gordon was unfamiliar with the name of each man and the racket specified, but here was the linking of all in the Half-Moon Brotherhood.

Wildcat nodded, "A good job, Sergeant Thorsen. I see that Deuce Dimon is not included. The others might now be easily spotted. But have you checked on the thumbprint of Royal Campano?"

"I checked all of them, chief," stated Sergeant Thorsen. "And all but Campano have records. Campano never has been printed, so far as I know."

Wildcat blew a cloud of smoke from his stubby pipe. He was summing up the items of evidence in connection with the doubtless framed murder of Campano.

A small wad of hair proved that an attempt had been made to fix the killing of old Dad Armour upon Dude Kellow. The automatic planted upon Kellow had belonged to Royal Campano. Marks in the bushes had shown that Campano or perhaps

some other person, had leaped from Campano's car when it went over the bluff.

"Could that person have been Deuce Dimon?" was the question in Wildcat's mind.

But the smallest of the items found by Wildcat was to him perhaps the most important. This was the small bit of curved glass. It was the part of an eye shell. Whoever had framed Dude Kellow had possibly changed the color of his eyes. That meant his whole appearance probably had been transformed.

Now Royal Campano had just formed a great racket organization, then had vanished that same night. This hardly seemed logical. Which brought Deuce Dimon more strongly back to Wildcat's consideration.

Either Royal Campano had found some sudden reason for disappearing, or it had become convenient for some other person to have him vanish. Certainly no other person stood in better position to benefit than Deuce Dimon.

Wildcat's mind whipped along. Ah Sun had been murdered. Why? To obtain papers he possessed with evidence against others, including Royal Campano?

Rafe Barton had been murdered. The thumb-printed paper before Wildcat at this moment indicated this was another move to destroy evidence against others, including Royal Campano.

"Sergeant Thorsen," said Wildcat thoughtfully. "Who do you suspect killed Ah Sun and Rafe Barton?"

The wooden-faced detective spoke without emotion.

"I would say that the other six racket boys named on that paper believe that Royal Campano was murdered, and that the police think Dude Kellow pulled the job," he said. "Now anyone of the others might have reason for wanting to get his own evidence tying him with the Half-Moon outfit away from the others. Smithers. Scabro. Ranahan. Robon."

"Or Deuce Dimon might find it valuable to turn killer long enough to get blackmail evidence against the four Half-Mooners still living," stated Wildcat.

"Yes," said Sergeant Thorsen. "But who could more safely commit those murders than a than who is already officially dead, and whose own murderer is supposed to have been buried by the police?"

"We seem to get together on one item," said Wildcat. "We both believe Royal Campano is still alive. And he is the one man who would be compelled for his own protection to clean out the others of the Half-Moon Brotherhood to make himself safe, just in case it was ever discovered that he still was in circulation."

"I don't often have headaches," said Sergeant Thorsen. "But with Deputy Bolton chasing The Whisperer, and with him popping up every time there is a murder, the whole thing becomes a pain between the ears."

Wildcat Gordon arose with a tight grin.

"If Royal Campano has assumed another identity," he said, "then it is a sure thing that five men are still walking around with damned sore arms and half-moon scars. Keep the boys on call, Sergeant Thorsen."

WILDCAT GORDON left headquarters as quietly as he had arrived. And within the following hour, he had talked over the phone with old Quick Trigger. It was then for the first time that Wildcat learned of Tiny's wild-eyed adventure and the strange condition of the girl from the convent, Clara Chalmers.

Wildcat's snapped command when this information was received was, "We have a fast job on our hands, Quick Trigger. It is just as well to leave Tiny where she is. She will be safe enough, I believe. Our job is to find Deuce Dimon. There is just a chance that a bigger extortion plot than the drainage contract is being fronted against Arthur Chalmers. There may be a helluva lot more than shock responsible for the illness of the Chalmers girl."

Wildcat issued rapid instructions. He cautioned Quick Trigger to keep a close watch on the Chalmers home, especially upon the men working for Jon Stevens, the drainage contractor.

"But if nothing happens before tonight, you will join me at the State line, Quick Trigger," said Wildcat. "We are making a little call upon Jon Stevens. I have reason to believe we will find another one of the damned half-moons mixed up in that contract racket."

It seemed strange that Wildcat Gordon should occupy himself with only one job during all that day. It was an attempt to revive the stupefied Brian Boru. But the Scottish terrier still remained in a trancelike state, neither moving nor being tempted by food.

A THICK, gray fog lay over West River near the State line that night. The beams of The Whisperer's coupé danced against the wall and gave but little visibility. Old Quick Trigger sat in the seat beside The Whisperer.

"Nothin' happened all day, Wildcat," he stated. "With all of this other crazy stuff breakin', I have been elected by Chalmers to handle his rose display at the Palace Show. I remembered an old trick with the poesies, an' I am about to produce a rose that is red, white and blue."

"If we don't stop this extortion crowd there may be no Palace Show so far as Chalmers is concerned," said The Whisperer huskily. "Perhaps Jon Stevens

will give me a name tonight. If he does, I'm betting I'll find another half-moon and—"

Quick Trigger's hand gripped The Whisperer's arm. The coupé had turned into a narrow road along West River. Pale, yellow light showed from a long, low building a short distance to one side. But in the lights of their car, Quick Trigger had thought he saw a tall shadow dart across the road.

"Evidently Jon Stevens is in his office," said Quick Trigger. "An' if my old eyes haven't failed, somebody's got his place staked out."

The Whisperer flicked out the coupé's lights. He shot the little car to a parking place under a tree and was moving from his seat.

"Stick here, Quick Trigger," he directed. "It is best that I see Jon Stevens alone. Perhaps The Whisperer can gain information where Wildcat Gordon would not have a chance."

"But look, Wildcat—"

Quick Trigger ceased his warning and changed his words to low oaths. The Whisperer had vanished silently. Quick Trigger imagined he again saw a shadow. This time it seemed to cross the yellow light streaming from the office of Jon Stevens.

THE ex-deputy eased one of his revolvers into readiness and waited. He would have followed The Whisperer, but it never was good business to interfere with his moves.

The Whisperer might have been a part of the gray fog. He moved with soundless speed toward the Jon Stevens office. He could see a man's figure outlined by the yellow light of the window. As he came closer, this disappeared abruptly.

The Whisperer crouched to one side, listening. Voices murmured inside the contractor's field office. The murmur increased to angry tones. There was a sharp oath. A man shouted, "I'll see you in Hell first!"

The smashing of blows, the overturning of furniture came so suddenly that The Whisperer was given no time to reach the office door. Curses and crunching blows were emitted. The floor of the shack office jarred with the impact of men's bodies.

Bending low, one of his silenced pistols held ready, The Whisperer darted forward. He was passing the corner of the office, making ready to slam through the door with his hard shoulder.

The man who came from the darkness upon The Whisperer moved with catlike agility. His leaping figure arose and strong, twisting hands seized both of The Whisperer's ears. No meaner or more effective hold was ever devised by a dirty fighter.

The Whisperer's head was pulled backward, and his neck almost snapped.

It was not often that the ex-army officer had had his ears pulled. He attempted to get his automatic around, but a sudden kick numbed his wrist and the weapon went to the ground. Not a word had been spoken.

Even as he went down under holds that he suddenly identified as coming only from the Orient, The Whisperer heard the thudding of bodies inside Jon Stevens' office. One man screamed with pain, as if a knife might be slowly entering his vitals.

The Whisperer's attacker now had twisted him over, had a knee in his stomach. Then it was that The Whisperer's own knee came up with driving force. The other man was jolted to one side. The Whisperer's left hand snapped up and iron fingers locked on a wrist. Though it felt as if he had removed his own ear, he used an Oriental twist of his own.

THE sound was like a dry stick breaking. His assailant let out a stomach grunt of agony. His hand went limp on the broken wrist. He attempted to gouge for an eye with his other hand. The Whisperer's knee rocked him to one side, rolled him free.

But as The Whisperer gained his feet, would have put in the finishing touches, the other man hit on his toes running. His dash into the trees and toward the highway was so fast that The Whisperer made no attempt to intercept him. Anyway, after that one scream and the thudding falls inside Jon Stevens' office, there had been no sound.

The door already was jammed open, sagging upon its hinges as if the two men who had fought had smashed into it. Both men were lying upon the floor. Jon Stevens, the contractor, was or had been a giant of a fellow. But only one glance was required into the battered face and the open, staring eyes to know that Jon Stevens was dead.

An architect's drawing table had been overturned. The Whisperer walked around it. A man as big as Jon Stevens, redheaded and hard-jawed, lay with his head crooked back. His eyes were puffed and swollen, and blood still oozed from his broken nose. There could be no doubt but that these two men had fought a primitive battle.

Blood puddled the floor beside both men. Yet it seemed incredible that they should have killed each other by chance.

The redheaded man was none other than Ranahan, another of the Half-Moon Brotherhood. The Whisperer did not have to pull back a sleeve to see the burned half-moon on his left forearm.

For Ranahan, named as one of the racketeers in the Royal Campano crowd, had lost his coat and most of his shirt. The Whisperer bent suddenly over the man who no doubt was the one demanding the payoff on the contract of Jon Stevens at the Chalmers flower farm. He gave a ghostly chuckle of satisfaction.

Papers and letters had been pulled from

Ranahan's pockets and his coat had been torn off to get at some sort of belt under his shirt. The belt had been opened. There was money scattered on the floor, but this was there only by chance.

The Whisperer straightened, swearing softly. Though they had no doubt been battling to the limit, Jon Stevens and Ranahan had not killed each other. Blood welled from a deep wound in Ranahan's throat. It had been inflicted by some instrument with two sharp points.

The Whisperer sprang over to Jon Stevens' body. The big contractor had been killed by the same instrument. The two points must have penetrated his brain under one ear. It showed on the face of it that both men could not have employed the same weapon, or death had been quick after it struck.

The Whisperer picked up an architect's circle points from the floor. They were bloodstained and in position to have made the wounds. Yet there was no evidence of another person having been in the office, and when death had struck, the one other man had been locked with The Whisperer outside.

The Whisperer started toward the open door. There was a dry, crackling report. It felt as if a hot iron had hit The Whisperer's forehead. He went to his knees, his face striking the floor as his senses faded out.

CHAPTER XIII
VOICE OF CAMPANO

THE WHISPERER awoke to find that he had been out of circulation for nearly half an hour. There was a numbed sensation across his scalp. A slug had clipped through the grayish blur of his hair. Despite the tearing pain, The Whisperer chuckled.

Whoever had fired that shot must have believed he had killed The Whisperer. It could have been the man with whom The Whisperer had fought, or it might have been the mysterious invader who had murdered Jon Stevens and Ranahan. In either case, there was one grim certainty.

The Whisperer made a quick bet with himself that the police already had been notified. No doubt the coppers were on their way, and the murderer was sure that the law would arrive to find the dead Whisperer beside the two murdered men.

"Sweet as hell," murmured The Whisperer. "Hooked up with Ah Sun's and the Rafe Barton killings, it would be just about perfect, only I—"

His belief was confirmed at that instant. Sirens screamed and patrol cars and motorcycles with flashing red eyes swung into the road leading to the dead contractor's office. The Whisperer removed himself to the nearest trees as the first policemen piled from the motorcycles.

He could only conjecture what might have happened to old Quick Trigger. Most certainly Quick Trigger would have heard the battle, the shot that had struck The Whisperer down. Had the murderer or the other man seized Quick Trigger by surprise? Probably not, guessed The Whisperer, for the ex-deputy was a hard man to surprise.

The Whisperer saw the tall Arthur Chalmers striding into the murder office with the first of the police. He heard the flower farmer swear a loud and terrible oath as he saw the body of Jon Stevens.

Under other circumstances, The Whisperer might have changed to Wildcat Gordon and returned to the scene. But blood was dried over his face from the wound on his head. There were other marks of battle which he could not erase quickly enough. He decided to stay out of the new murder picture until he could make contact with Quick Trigger and learn more of what had happened outside.

QUICK TRIGGER had not been seized, nor had he been surprised. The old man had heard the fight in the office, had seen the sudden attack upon The Whisperer. He had been moving to go to the aid of The Whisperer when that fight had ended suddenly and the other man had started running.

Quick Trigger saw The Whisperer darting into the office. Then he had a clear glimpse of the fleeing man in the light from the office window. The man was none other than the tall, dark-eyed Deuce Dimon.

Deuce Dimon was holding one arm crookedly, and hissing oaths. But he was moving fast as he flashed across the narrow road. A motor roared and lights of a car jumped into view. The car started, turned, and went past Quick Trigger's coupé at high speed. It was impossible for Deuce Dimon to have seen the coupé in the darkness.

Quick Trigger had now but one idea. The Whisperer had said they must nail Deuce Dimon. In some manner, The Whisperer had hinted he believed Deuce Dimon responsible for the half-moon murders. Quick Trigger slid the coupé into the road, and started without lights.

Perhaps Deuce Dimon had no thought of pursuit. Or it may have been that his broken wrist kept him from thinking of other things. Quick Trigger had the red eye of Dimon's taillight in sight as it entered the city and turned into one of the uptown apartment districts.

Deuce Dimon parked his car and walked a block. There were others on the street, and Quick Trigger had little difficulty in shadowing the man to a private house with an old brownstone front. Quick Trigger made out that this house had been converted into a rooming place. It was one of the most tumble-down buildings in the neighborhood.

Deuce Dimon was holding his fractured wrist close to his body. It was evident he wanted help and

he wanted it quick. Old Quick Trigger saw that a physician's sign swung beside the door. The old man waited until Dimon was inside. His sudden judgment was that it would be as well to wait for Deuce Dimon to come out, then grab him before he could make a getaway. This would keep him from becoming involved with the doctor inside.

Quick Trigger saw that the sign read "Doctor Jalo—Surgeon." He went along the block. Then he noticed a light come on in a second-story window. The gilt sign of Doctor Jalo was upon this window. A short fire escape ladder swung in the darkness and the stairs led past the doctor's office.

The old man debated the idea, then could see no advantage in risking a climb to spy upon the doctor's office. Deuce Dimon would surely return to his car. Quick Trigger waited impatiently. Half an hour or more passed. He walked up the street and made sure Dimon's car was still parked.

Another car suddenly braked to a stop beside the Doctor Jalo house. Old Quick Trigger had only a glimpse of a man running hastily up the steps. He was too far away to identify him, but a strange hunch started him swearing.

Though in his sixties, Quick Trigger made short work of the fire escape. In a minute, he was crouching outside the lighted window. Deuce Dimon was in a chair and sweating. A short, swarthy doctor was bandaging the broken wrist.

Quick Trigger recalled that Doctor Jalo's reputation was a special note on police records. He conducted a profitable, if questionable, business. A door opened from another office, and Doctor Jalo whipped around, staring. In the chair, Deuce Dimon did not move, but a queer, hard smile came over his face.

Quick Trigger could not see the man in the other doorway. But he heard Deuce Dimon rap out, "Well, Well! So the boss is back in person! You can put up that gun, Campano! Also, don't make any moves you'll regret!"

The unseen man's voice was hoarse, hardly to be identified.

"You've got to stop it, Dimon! I Damn you, I'll—"

"Threats will get you nowhere, Campano!" snapped Deuce Dimon. "Takin' a helluva chance on the cops pickin' you up, aren't you? You're supposed to be very dead, you know! This is as good a time as any to tell you, Campano, that I've taken over where you left off, and it'll cost you plenty."

"Dimon! I would kill you now! You're going with me and end this—"

"Shut the door as you go out, Campano!" sneered Deuce Dimon. "You know damned well you won't kill me, and you know why! I'll come to you when I am ready, and it's costin' you plenty!

"ROYAL" CAMPANO

But first I'm cleanin' up on the rest of the half-moon crowd. It's a nice, sweet lot of dough!"

The unseen Campano uttered a terrible oath. Doctor Jalo spoke.

"Better do as Dimon says, Campano," advised the doctor. "You let yourself in for it, and you've always said the sweetest way out is to payoff."

Quick Trigger had a big revolver in his hand. What had happened to the once mighty Royal Campano? He tried to get a glimpse of the queerly hunched big man who had given the police a runaround for so long a time.

Then he heard the muffled voice say, "All right, Dimon. You hold the cards for the minute. But I'm telling you, one way or the other, I'll get you for this thing if it's—"

There was a sound of an outer door opening. A man's voice said, "Is Doctor Jalo in there?"

Royal Campano must have faded from view. Deuce Dimon said to Doctor Jalo, "Get me out of here the back way. Don't worry about Campano. He washed himself up. I won't be forgettin' you when I cash in on this setup."

"You've got all the stuff, Dimon," said Doctor Jab. "I won't be refusing a little cut."

Quick Trigger knew that Campano must be slipping from the house back to his car. The old man decided swiftly that Campano was far more important at this moment than Deuce Dimon. Doctor Jalo would keep and if it came to that, the doctor could be sweated when Wildcat Gordon decided he wanted Deuce Dimon.

QUICK TRIGGER was halfway down the rusty

fire escape to the alley when he heard a car start out in front. He swung and dropped into the darkness. A brick rolled and the old man's ankle twisted. He fell, but got up and stumbled to the corner of the house. The car was just rolling away.

Quick Trigger caught a glimpse of Royal Campano's queerly hunched shoulders as the supposedly murdered racketeer bent over the wheel. He saw Campano's thick, greasy, black hair and the man was wearing no hat.

The car shot by, picking up fast in second. Quick Trigger stood swearing, for it was too late to attempt to reach his own coupé. Then he had one more brief slant at Campano's head and face as the man's car whirled the corner. Quick Trigger grunted, "Damn! Can you beat that! He was taking off his hair!"

That was all that Quick Trigger had seen. The hunched Campano had pulled the black hair away as his car took the side street. It was evident that the reputedly murdered half-moon boss was changing his appearance before his car would arrive at some other place.

Quick Trigger's ankle hurt. He had lost Campano's trail, but at least he had established the fact of his being alive. The ex-deputy whipped out one of his revolvers. Deuce Dimon had requested Doctor Jalo to get him out by a back way.

Quick Trigger reached the backstairs to the brownstone house. He moved slowly on his bent ankle, climbing, his revolver ready. He was mad enough at the moment to take both Deuce Dimon and Doctor Jalo along with him, living or dead.

The rear door of the upper hallway swung loosely. Quick Trigger pushed in.

There was a dim light, and he could see the sign over Doctor Jalo's office. He crept slowly along the wall, moving inch by inch. His notion at the moment was to use a little third degree of his own upon the pair in the doctor's office.

Perhaps he could clean up this thing and stop the deadly risk Wildcat Gordon had been taking.

The light was burning inside and Quick Trigger slowly turned the knob of Doctor Jalo's door. One minute later, he was using rare oaths. Deuce Dimon and Doctor Jalo had disappeared! The other man who had started Campano out when he had entered was not in sight. There was evidence that Doctor Jalo had fled hastily with Deuce Dimon, for cases were opened and some instruments had been spilled on the floor.

IT was only after he had made sure Dimon's car was gone, and had walked twice around the block, that Quick Trigger profanely admitted he was licked. Perhaps he had been heard going down the fire escape. If so, it was unlikely that Doctor Jalo would return to that office.

Quick Trigger again ascended to Doctor Jab's office. But after ten minutes, all that he had was a forgotten address book. This included the names of some of the best-known boys on the police records.

When Quick Trigger got downtown, the newspapers already were screaming the new murders. Once again it had been reported that the deaths must be the work of The Whisperer. That report had been made directly to the police over the telephone.

Deputy Bolton had received the report, but when he attempted to check back on the call, he failed to discover who had given the information.

In the meantime, Quick Trigger was aware he must return quickly to the Chalmers place. He chuckled as he thought of the job that Wildcat had assigned him. He was thinking of Dude Kellow.

The young man who had escaped being framed into the murder of Royal Campano had taken a sudden and strange interest in the girl, Clara Chalmers. And Quick Trigger recalled that the girl herself seemed to pay little attention to any other person, including her grief-stricken father.

About this time, The Whisperer had reached one of his hideouts. He was delighted to discover that Brian Boru, the Scottish terrier, had suddenly become normal. The dog was strangely hungry, but snarled a welcome when The Whisperer entered.

The Whisperer looked over the place quickly. He could tell that someone had entered during his absence. When he looked at Brian Boru, he was sure this could have been none other than Deuce Dimon.

CHAPTER XIV
THREE SCARED MEN

"AH SUN, Barton, Ranahan," said The Whisperer slowly to himself. "And that leaves Scabro, Smithers and Robon. Brian Boru, we are making a little call on a nice citizen who may be very, very dead before very long."

With his scalp wound dressed, the gray Whisperer swung into the night. He had been unable to discover what had become of Quick Trigger. He was completely in the dark concerning the sudden reappearance of Royal Campano or the other events, for Quick Trigger had gone straight back to the Chalmers place.

But The Whisperer now was acting upon the knowledge that something more was due to break quickly. He had heard himself accused in newspaper headlines of another murder. Before he headed for the waterfront, The Whisperer took but one precaution: he called Sergeant Thorsen.

"If I do not report to you again before midnight." he said, "I would take some of the boys down and have a quiet look at Scabro's fish house on the old dock."

The Whisperer was acting on more than a hunch.

He did not believe too strongly in hunches. Good police work was always based on cold, hard facts. And it was a cold fact that three men, Scabro, Smithers and Robon, would be by this time in a lather of fear. With the murder of Ranahan, these others of the Half-Moon Brotherhood would cease to believe in coincidence.

So where would they most likely meet?

The Whisperer eliminated the uptown offices of Smithers and Robon. This precious pair worked in higher circles than Scabro. Straight blackmail and grafting on city contractors rated farther up the scale than running in Chinese and other aliens.

But the three would get together. So Scabro's filthy fish house was the most likely spot.

More than the murders of their brotherhood companions had arisen to disturb Scabro, Smithers and Robon this same night.

SCABRO, the swarthy fellow who had been so close to the murdered Ah Sun, had rammed his cruiser onto a reef at low tide in the upper part of the West River Sound. At the moment, a police patrol boat was screaming down the river, and its light had been searching for the cruiser.

Scabro was alone in the small wheelhouse of the cruiser. As he jammed the boat's hull onto the muddy reef, he was far enough off the channel to be safe for the time. But the ugly Scabro was taking no chances. He picked up a heavy wrench and went down into the small hold of the boat.

There were blows and low, gurgling cries. Within the next five minutes, four bodies had splashed dully into the tide. Scabro waded to the nearest dock, his grimy fingers touching the money he already had been paid for landing four Chinese. The Chinamen would never see America.

Scabro crossed several wharves, going toward his own old fish house. He halted suddenly as two men came toward him. Both were well dressed. One was nursing a blackened eye. The other walked with a limp. Otherwise they appeared to be good citizens, except for the furtive glances they were casting over their shoulders.

Smithers, whose racket was blackmail, had run against an ugly customer. A man had caught him stealing a set of photographs. He had been thrown downstairs after being hit in the eye. A new city purchasing agent had all but booted Robon from the City Hall.

But these matters were trivial compared to the newspaper story Robon displayed. The man's voice was shaking.

"Dammit, I'm for taking it on the lam!" he blurted out. "First it's Campano! Then Ah Sun and Barton! Tonight it's Ranahan! I tell you we're marked by—"

"Sure you are!" cut in an unpleasant voice that came from the shadows of Scabro's old fish house. "You're marked by the half-moon! You're as good as finished and unless I take over and you accept my orders, you'll all be decoratin' marble slabs!"

"Deuce Dimon!" snarled the squat, ugly Scabro. "Come inside with that stuff! Maybe the damned cops are already spottin' the place!"

The tall, dark-eyed Deuce Dimon faced the three men over a table foul with the stale cleanings of fish. Dimon did not say why his wrist was bandaged.

Dimon stared fixedly at the other men. He stood so long saying nothing that Smithers broke out with, "For Heaven's sake, Dimon! Just when we had an outfit where nobody could double-cross anyone, along—"

"Nuts!" snapped Deuce Dimon. "There were seven of you with the half-moons on your arms! First Campano is bumped off! Then three more! Maybe you know where your own murder confessions are at this minute?"

SCABRO licked his thick lips. Smithers and Robon shivered and glanced into the shadows. Two kinds of fear was sapping their nerves: a killer had broken loose in the strange brotherhood on the same night Royal Campano had formed it. So any might now expect to die suddenly, violently.

The other fear was that spoken by Deuce Dimon: their murder confessions. For each of the brotherhood had thumbprinted a confession of a past murder. It had been their protection against each other.

"Well, who made use of the stuff you spilled?" said Deuce Dimon, making the idea sink in. "The police are yellin' about a strange crook called The Whisperer. We have all heard of The Whisperer in the past. But no one has ever seen him. Why, I might be him. Or"— the dark, hypnotic eyes swung slowly from face to face—"perhaps one of you three. And whichever one it is, he has the murder confessions stolen off the others.

"So, I know more of runnin' these rackets than any other man. We will have to pick up from here and go on. If there is really a Whisperer in these murders, we will have to get him."

"Stop it, Dimon! Stop it!"

This came from Smithers, who was a dandified fellow with a weaker chin than the others. He added, "Maybe you know The Whisperer yourself, Dimon. If you do, you are the man who could get him? What would it be worth if you rubbed out The Whisperer?"

Deuce Dimon's smile slanted from his fixed eyes. This former charlatan, hypnotist and whatnot, so suddenly thrust into opportunity by the strangely framed "murder" of Royal Campano, had been working up to this point. There was no doubt that these three men before him were in fear of their lives.

Each had made thousands from his racket. Now they could either remain and risk being wiped out, or taking raps for murder, or they could get rid of the mysterious murderer who was stalking the Half-Moon Brotherhood.

"I'd give up ten grand, Dimon, if you'd lay it on the line that this Whisperer was rubbed out," said Scabro. "There is a Whisperer. Old Ah Sun told me about him, and Ah Sun had him just before he was rubbed out. So I happen to be sure you would know where he could be found."

Scabro was staring at the dandified Smithers as he talked. He scented to have either a dislike for, or a suspicion of, the blackmail racketeer. And at the same time, Robon, who had quick, small eyes, was looking in about the same manner at Scabro.

Well enough Deuce Dimon knew it was the old story. Where there has been a double-cross, no one feels safe, and no one trusts another.

"Ten grand, Scabro?" mocked Deuce Dimon. "Ten times ten grand from each of you is the figure. That's when I prove to you I have rubbed out The Whisperer, grantin' that I happen to know him, and still sayin' he could be anyone of the four of us here."

This involved reasoning was twisting their minds, as Deuce Dimon intended it should. None knew that Royal Campano still lived. Campano was the big payoff. But if Dimon could set these three against each other and at the same time stand to collect, he was not overlooking any bets.

"I'd see you in Hell before I'd put up a hundred grand—"

This from Scabro. But Dimon interrupted with a calm, icy voice.

"If you don't put it up, Scabro, you'll be in hell, but you'll be a long time seein' me there!"

Deuce Dimon had been holding the eyes of the other three for many minutes. Perhaps they did not realize the hidden power of the man. Smithers was the first to utter hoarse agreement to pay a hundred grand if the half-moon murder menace was removed.

PERHAPS Scabro, Smithers and Robon did not realize they were partly at least under the control of another brain when they slipped quietly from the fish house.

"It would be best for us to separate at once and not be seen together at any time," Deuce Dimon had advised.

Robon walked out first. He walked fearfully along the edge of the rotting wharf. As he went, he fingered a pistol in his pocket. Suppose one of the others really was The Whisperer? That was the thought Deuce Dimon had put there.

The dandified Smithers walked as fearfully as Robon. He stayed in the shadows close to the old fish house, and started toward another street. His one thought seemed to be to remove himself from the place as quickly as possible.

Then came the swarthy, narrow-eyed Scabro. And Scabro was gripping a heavy-bladed knife. His mind may have been slower than the others, but there had always been a certain lust to kill in the runner of Chinese. Suddenly he was close behind Smithers.

Smithers stepped into a lighted spot. There was a gleaming flash across the misty air. The dandified, frightened Smithers made hardly any outcry. The heavy blade of Scabro's knife struck him squarely between the shoulders. Only the bone haft stuck out as Smithers fell.

Scabro stepped back and saw that Robon had turned.

Perhaps Deuce Dimon had imagined something like this would happen. For Dimon was already many yards away, hurrying toward the street. But when he heard the commotion, he turned, watching.

Then it was that Deuce Dimon saw the gliding gray figure come around the corner of the fish house. Dimon, alone of many, identified that figure instantly. For he had been closer to him than any of the others.

The Whisperer had been crouching in the shadows when the four men came onto the rotting dock. The black, vicious Brian Boru was spread beside him close to the wall. The Whisperer talked to the dog as if he were of human mind.

"Stay here, Brian Boru, until I call," spoke his whispering voice.

But few if any animals in the world would have obeyed that order; especially during the next few minutes. For The Whisperer's gliding stride carried him to the bulky Scabro before the swarthy murderer could turn. It was the flat side of a hard palm that cracked Scabro across the base of his skull.

Stunned, Scabro staggered, went to his knees. Robon, nearby, cried out hoarsely. The pistol jerked from his pocket and flamed. At that moment, The Whisperer's leap had caused him to teeter on the edge of the old wharf. The bullet plowed into one shoulder with a numbing jolt. The weapon flamed again, and the bullet fanned The Whisperer's cheek.

It was The Whisperer's choice to throw up his arms and permit his body to pitch down into the black water. He went down, and the murky sunset bubbled. Scabro was getting to his feet, stumbling, dazed from the blow on the back of his neck.

Deuce Dimon started back. Then he heard the screaming siren of a police car in the street approaching the wharf. It was joined by another.

"I got him!" yelled Robon. "It's The Whisperer! He's dead!"

Men were pouring into the street above the old fish house. Deuce Dimon climbed over piling to another wharf and faded into the darkness. Part of his plan had been unexpectedly upset, but he wore a grim smile. The Whisperer was dead. Now there was nothing between him and extorting the last penny of Royal Campano's fortune.

THE WHISPERER came up, clinging to a piling underneath the wharf. He heard the screaming sirens, the pounding of feet, and he knew that Sergeant Thorsen was on the job. Over his head, Scabro said hoarsely, "Out to the end of the wharf, Robon, to my boat there." Robon, who believed he had killed The Whisperer, and Scabro, who had added one more to the half-moon murders, started to move. The dead Smithers lay with the bone-handled knife in his back. A police whistle shrilled.

All this time two glowing eyes had been fixed upon the place where The Whisperer had vanished. The vicious, white-fanged Brian Boru had been told to await his master's command. Muscles twitched under the dog's black fur, but he held his place.

Then came the weird whisper, floating from the darkness over the water.

"Get them, Brian Boru! Get them!" The whisper itself swung Scabro and Robon around, though the police were less than fifty yards away. Scabro croaked an oath. Robon started to run again. A vicious, tearing snarl of rage came from beside the fish house.

"Look out!" bawled Scabro.

But his warning was too late. Robon's pistol flamed vainly at what seemed a black body in mid-air. The bullet may have fanned close to the mad Scottish terrier, but it interfered neither with his leap nor his fangs. A cry of terror and pain broke from Robon.

Fangs like knives snapped onto his chin. The weight of Brian Boru's body jerked Robon off his feet. His teeth tore loose from their hold, but held bloody flesh as Robon rolled onto his back.

Scabro was jumping past his fallen companion. He was gaining yards toward the small boat he had concealed at the end of the dark wharf. It had been impossible to see the black dog clearly. Suddenly Scabro felt searing pain at the base of his neck.

Brian Boru took the latest half-moon killer down with fangs set into the neck bones of his spine. Scabro's flat nose became flatter as he hit the wharf. Brian Boru shifted his hold. In another few seconds he would have sent his long teeth home in Scabro's spinal cord.

But again came that penetrating whisper.

"Enough, Brian Boru! Come down here, boy!"

A savage whine of disappointment, and then Brian Boru went over the edge of the wharf. The Whisperer had heard the dog hit both men. Now as Brian Boru struck the water, swimming, The Whisperer released his hold, caught the dog and struck out silently, but strongly, toward the shore under the wharf.

ROBON was on his feet, staggering crazily, half of his chin torn off, when Sergeant Thorsen's hard hands closed on his shoulders and spun him around. A detective got Scabro as he was scrambling to his feet. The alien smuggler had a hand in his coat, reaching for a weapon. The dick's hard knuckles took that idea out of him.

Sergeant Thorsen passed Robon to another copper. He knelt over the dead Smithers. His grim smile was confident. The smooth bone handle of that knife would carry prints. The wooden-faced sergeant sometimes had his hunches. He pulled off the murdered man's coat and jerked back his left sleeve.

A flashlight ringed the half-moon scar on Smithers' forearm.

"Have a look at the left arms of those other nice boys!" snapped the sergeant.

The half-moons of Scabro and Robon were revealed. A dick said, "Damned if I didn't hear a whispering voice, and a splash! There was somebody else in this! I'll have a look—" Sergeant Thorsen's wooden face showed no emotion. This was his own picked squad. Wildcat Gordon's dependables.

"I did not hear any whisper or any splash," said the sergeant conclusively. "Wrap up Scabro and Robon for headquarters. This is one rap they will not beat."

The dick who had spoken grinned a little.

"I guess I was mistaken," he said. "I didn't hear anything."

CHAPTER XIV
SIX OF THE HALF-MOONS

MAYOR VAN ROYSTON raged at Deputy Henry Bolton in the headquarters office. Rafe Barton, Ranahan and Smithers, three dead men with half-moon scars, were on the marble slabs of the morgue. Scabro and Robon were locked up, but none other than Sergeant Thorsen and his squad had seen them.

"You say Sergeant Thorsen claims Wildcat Gordon ordered that no one was to see these killers without his presence, Henry?" said the mayor.

Deputy Bolton nodded gloomily and half snarled his reply.

"More than that, Mayor Van Royston," he said. "I had a direct call from Gordon, and he repeated the order to me. He's still the commissioner, you see, so I'll have to let it ride as it is."

The door opened and the jaunty Wildcat strode in. He was wearing his loudest checkered suit this morning. If his left shoulder was stiff under a

bandage, it could not be detected.

"Commissioner Gordon," said Mayor Van Royston primly. "I have an order to give."

Wildcat's yellow shoes hit the top of his desk, and he leaned back with a broad grin.

"That's swell, your honor," he replied cheerfully. "Let's have it."

"I demand that the newspaper boys and the district attorney be given immediate interviews with Scabro and Robon, in order that some of this epidemic of murders may be cleared up in the public mind," stated Mayor Van Royston. "Your men clean up one of the worst murder gangs in history, then you keep the public mind in an uproar."

Wildcat arose slowly, walked toward the outer door.

"The public mind be damned!" he rapped out. "Your demand is received and filed, but I have had Scabro and Robon removed to a place where nobody will interview them until I'm ready. I'll let you know when that is, 'your honor!' I have other business for the moment."

Though Mayor Van Royston raged and the newspapers clamored for statements, the unpredictable Wildcat Gordon had stepped calmly out of the picture. Efforts to extract information from Sergeant Thorsen were about the same as a man trying to open an oyster with his fingernails.

It was afternoon when Wildcat Gordon stepped into his coupé, drove to an outlying district and stepped out again. But when he emerged, he was the man in gray with the round-brimmed hat. The Whisperer moved to a quiet spot.

He spread out the paper containing the thumbprints of the seven members of the Half-Moon Brotherhood. He studied these for a few minutes intently.

He was sure that Deuce Dimon believed The Whisperer to be dead. Deuce Dimon would know that Scabro and Robon were held for the murder of Smithers, for The Whisperer had seen Deuce Dimon scuttle from Scabro's fish house. Then, whatever his play or the stakes he sought, Deuce Dimon would have to strike quickly.

For Dimon must know or believe that Scabro and Robon would squawk.

The Whisperer folded the paper, got into his coupé and drove to a public telephone. He called for Quick Trigger at the Arthur Chalmers farm, in the voice of Wildcat Gordon.

When Quick Trigger replied, The Whisperer said first, "Don't try to tell me what happened to you last night. I can guess pretty well."

"But," said Quick Trigger quickly, "I heard Royal Campano last night. Deuce Dimon has got somethin' on him, so much that Campano is afraid for some reason to put Dimon on the spot."

"I know that already," said the amazing Whisperer. "But here is what I want you to do. And have everything ready for the first half hour after dark tonight."

The Whisperer gave short, quick instructions. He hung up and went back to his coupé. A few miles out in the country, he stretched under a tree and slept during the afternoon.

SLOW, soft darkness crept over the prize flower farm of Arthur Chalmers. Though Quick Trigger had been given strange instructions, the old man seemed intent upon nothing but his job of helping Chalmers produce prize roses.

Quick Trigger was working among the perfumed flower beds. Young Dude Kellow was a little distance away. Chalmers himself came walking slowly along the pathway. He watched Quick Trigger a moment.

"Takes a lot of interest to stay on the job after dark," he said. "You believe you can graft in the new buds?"

"Have a look at these, Mr. Chalmers," said old Quick Trigger.

He presented a small package of rose-bush stems wrapped in waxed paper. The big farmer took the package and examined the sprouts. He shook his head dubiously:

"We have the red-and-white rose," he said. "It will be a miracle if you can produce a triple color."

Quick Trigger took the sprouts.

"Well, I'm gettin' a start at it today if it takes all night," he said eagerly.

At that moment, there was a hail across the garden. Mayor Van Royston came walking over from his place.

"You wanted to see me, Chalmers?" he said.

"Yes, well—yes," said the farmer. "Wanted you to see the red-and-white rose that will go to the Palace Show, if our new expert doesn't produce even a better one."

The tall, massive-jawed Chalmers seemed attempting to conceal some private suffering. He conducted Mayor Van Royston past several beds of blooming flowers. Though it was now dark, a system of lights had sprung up.

As Chalmers and the mayor walked away, there was a slight movement in the bushes close to Quick Trigger.

"Good enough," said a husky, whispering voice. "You have carried out my instructions, Quick Trigger?

The gray Whisperer was a part of the shrubbery among the shadows.

"Damn, yes, I've done it, Wildcat," muttered Quick Trigger. "But I don't see—"

"Let me have it!" spoke the eerie whisper. "We have no time to delay! You keep your eye upon Dude Kellow! Don't let him out of your sight!"

A small object passed from Quick Trigger's hand

to that of The Whisperer. The gray man merged with the shrubbery, and hardly a leaf rustled as he faded from view.

AT this moment, another figure was skulking across Chalmers' semi-lighted garden in the direction of the white, rambling house. There had been no work on the drainage job because of the murder of Stevens the night before. But this scuttling shadow was one of the workers on the contract.

He was the dark Hindu, turbaned and earringed. Fuzzy, black beard covered the lower part of his face. His dark eyes were taking in every movement. He passed from bush to bush, coming closer to the Chalmers house.

The Hindu halted only when he was looking directly into an open, lighted window. Behind the thin screen, Tiny Traeger sat close to the queerly silent Clara Chalmers. Since the first outbreak, when it had seemed the palefaced girl was suffering with a delusion she must kill her father, Clara had been tractable.

The girl seemed to have been attracted to Dude Kellow, the young assistant in the garden. By some strange quirk of her shocked mind, she found some speech when she was with the young man. Tiny had watched this with interest. Tonight, Tiny was gravely considering what must soon happen.

For Tiny had not been informed by Quick Trigger of Dude Kellow's status, and the girl had begun to suspect that Kellow might be the one person who held Clara Chalmers in his power. For several minutes Clara Chalmers had been sitting rigidly, staring through the window into the darkness.

Tiny suddenly had a queer feeling there was someone out there. She slid a hand under her waist and gripped a small automatic. She was on the point of reaching for the light switch and darkening the room when a strange, whining cry broke from the white lips of the other girl.

Clara Chalmers was slowly rising to her feet. Her hazel eyes were fixed upon something unseen outside. She started walking slowly toward the screened window.

"Miss Chalmers!" cried Tiny, seeking to startle her.

But the call brought no response. Clara Chalmers now was turning toward the door, as if something was directing her through the black space of the window. Tiny sprang toward her, but at that instant the light window screen broke through.

A hideously contorted, black-bearded face appeared under a dirty turban. A swarthy hand stretched into the room, with the fingers extended. They were pointing directly at Clara Chalmers.

The turbaned Hindu had thrust his hand through the screen. His other arm was tightly bound to his side. His lips were opened and he was about to speak when viselike fingers clamped the back of his neck. A thumb as hard as an iron point pushed into the soft spot under one ear.

Then came the weird, chilling whisper from the dark garden behind the turbaned Hindu.

"You will free the girl now, Deuce Dimon!"

The turban came unwrapped from the Hindu's head. A part of his false, fuzzy beard slid to one side. But that hard thumb probed inexorably for nerves deep under the jawbone. It seemed as if the thumb would penetrate all the way to the man's brain.

"No! I'll be—"

Deuce Dimon's hoarse squawk cut off. "I will not make it so easy as to kill you, Dimon!" came that icy whisper. "But you will never be the same when I have finished! Free her, and now!"

Tiny Traeger shrank to the wall, crying out. Clara Chalmers stood as still as a white statue. In that sudden silence, Tiny could hear a small crunching of bone. It was horrible the way the Hindu's face twisted to one side. The iron hand of The Whisperer had dislocated his jaw. That probing thumb was adding to the tearing pain.

"Now, Deuce Dimon! Or I'll leave you that way!"

The Hindu's stretched hand quivered. Human nerves could stand only so much pain. He attempted to writhe free, but The Whisperer jammed his face into the screen.

"Yes—yes—yes—"

The short-bitten words were terrible. They came from tongue and throat bound by the crunched bone of the jaw. Deuce Dimon's stretched fingers snapped. He cried out hoarsely.

At that instant, The Whisperer heard someone moving quickly through the shrubbery not far outside the house.

CLARA CHALMERS swayed on her feet. But she did not faint or fall. Instead, she uttered a strange, shrill laugh. Then her clouded hazel eyes were clearing. She was turning, looking at Tiny Traeger as if she had never seen her before. She passed one white hand over her eyes.

"Who—who are you?" she said unsteadily. "Where am—yes—I know—oh, the red spiders. They are burning my back! Where is my father?"

Tiny started guiding the suddenly reawakened girl to a chair. It was difficult to realize that the shocked mind had picked up where it had apparently left off normal thinking, back in the den of Ah Sun.

Someone was entering the hallway of the house, coming toward the door. Tiny imagined it was the girl's father, and she was glad. She had seen that he had suffered terribly, but had seemed unable to take any measures against his daughter's desperate plight.

Then the Hindu face of Deuce Dimon was literally jerked from the window.

The Whisperer saw that Clara Chalmers had been freed from the hypnotic spell of the charlatan, the sideshow fakir with his magic partly learned in India. The Whisperer's free hand clenched and moved upward for a knockout punch. For the time being, The Whisperer was finished with Deuce Dimon.

But the swinging fist struck the side of a head that suddenly snapped over on a limp neck. The Whisperer's fingers holding Dimon's neck felt the sting of the slug that cracked from a silenced pistol in the shrubbery.

The bullet crossed the back of Deuce Dimon's neck, biting deeply enough to snap his spine at the base of the skull. His tall body sagged abruptly and The Whisperer let him go, leaping himself to the protection of the nearest bushes.

The crackling of the gun was low, for it was well silenced. The Whisperer could see the lurid flashes. Lead fanned the leaves of the bushes near him. But there was a ghostly chuckle in The Whisperer's throat.

His own modern pistol could have chopped the killer of Deuce Dimon from his hiding place, but The Whisperer desired altogether another ending to the show-up of the Half-Moon Brotherhood.

For now the end of a strangely twisted trail was in sight. The Whisperer had no doubt but that Royal Campano himself had fired the bullet that had broken Deuce Dimon's neck.

In spite of this knowledge, the gray Whisperer slipped noiselessly out of range of the silenced gun. Suddenly its flaming ceased. It had made but a minor noise in the night.

As he passed around a bubbling fountain, The Whisperer had a final view of the room in which Clara Chalmers had been so strangely brought back to her normal self. He knew, with a grimness of knowledge, that had Deuce Dimon died before the hypnotic spell was lifted from the girl, it might have been weeks or months before she would have recovered.

Now The Whisperer saw the door inside the room open. The man who entered quickly was none other than the well-disguised Dude Kellow. The young man had been near enough to hear one of Deuce Dimon's cries of pain.

The Whisperer saw young Kellow take Clara Chalmers into his arms.

"This will be sweet as Hell," said The Whisperer's ghostly voice.

CHAPTER XV
THE DEAD MAN LIVES

OLD Quick Trigger had followed Dude Kellow. He was obeying the order to keep the young man in sight. Quick Trigger also heard the cries of Deuce Dimon on the other side of the wide rambling home of Arthur Chalmers. The old man was aware that in but a couple of short days, Dude Kellow had become deeply interested in the daughter of the house.

Young Kellow seemed drawn by sympathy for the girl's strange trance. And the girl had been attracted to Kellow. Quick Trigger was thinking, even now, that Chalmers would not like this affair if he discovered it. The old man was close behind Kellow when he burst into the hallway of the house, running toward the girl's room.

"What is it? What's happened?" snapped a voice behind Quick Trigger.

The excited Mayor Van Royston, who had been walking through the garden with Chalmers; came hastily along the gravel walk.

"I don't know," growled Quick Trigger, whose own disguise had prevented recognition by the mayor.

"Chalmers heard someone moving and ran around the house!" exclaimed Mayor Van Royston. "Here he comes now!"

Quick Trigger halted in the doorway. Kellow had gone on into the room of Clara Chalmers. Arthur Chalmers was striding toward them, his face white and his eyes burning with anxiety.

"Great grief!" groaned the flower farmer. "I thought I heard shooting! If anything has happened to my daughter, I'll—"

Chalmers pushed his way past Quick Trigger, going into the house. Quick Trigger stepped aside to permit Mayor Van Royston to follow the other man. He saw Chalmers reach the door of his daughter's room where it swung partly open. Then a terrible oath burst from Chalmers. One big hand slapped the door of the room farther open.

"Why, you lowdown, filthy swine!" roared Chalmers, lunging into the room.

Quick Trigger was near enough to see the great, bony fist of Chalmers swing in a half arc. There was a crunching blow and the low cry of Kellow's voice. The knuckles of the farmer caught the young man under an ear with a staggering blow.

CHALMERS had arrived in time to see his daughter in Kellow's arms. It was incredible, but the girl's own white hands had been clasped behind the garden worker's neck. As Kellow stumbled sidewise, Clara Chalmers cried out and fell to the floor. Tiny Traeger was close to the wall, staring at the enraged father.

"But you don't understand—"

Young Kellow stammered the words, attempting to placate the furious Chalmers. But his speech was cut off by a terrible, smashing second blow. Chalmers seemed to have the power of a pile-driver in his heavy shoulders. His tightly drawn mouth held murderous anger. Kellow's head rocked, and it seemed as if his neck would snap. He kept his feet by catching at a chair. The ruthless

Chalmers drove another blow directly into the young man's face, and this time Kellow went down.

But now Mayor Van Royston and Quick Trigger were directly behind Chalmers. Tiny Traeger was staring at the face of the fallen Kellow, who was attempting to get to his feet. The knockout punch had been devastating in its force. But it seemed impossible that a man's fist could have so altered another man's countenance.

Glass had tinkled and bits fell to the floor. One of young Kellow's eyes became abruptly very blue in color, while the other remained darkly brown. At the same time bits of gum had been driven from under Kellow's jaws and other bits from his now bleeding nose.

"For grief's sake!" exploded Mayor Van Royston. "How could—"

He got no farther than that. The big flower farmer was apparently as stricken with amazement as the others. Kellow looked straight at him from one blue eye and one brown eye. Quick Trigger knew that one of the eye shells with which he had disguised Dude Kellow had been smashed by the farmer's blows.

It was almost a miracle that Kellow had not been cut and blinded, but except for the queerly altered shape of his face, and the bleeding nose, he seemed not badly hurt. For he was slowly getting to his feet.

"Chalmers! Chalmers! Don't do that!"

This was the sudden restraining cry of Mayor Van Royston himself. For the hand of the flower farmer had dived into one pocket. A terrible oath came from his throat.

"So, that's it!"

The farmer was whipping out a revolver. It swung around, coming down steadily upon the body of young Kellow. For once, Mayor Van Royston proved useful. Seeing his longtime friend about to commit a crime of violence in his insane rage over finding this man in his daughter's room, the mayor hit out with both hands just as the revolver exploded.

"Damn him to—"

Chalmers pivoted, his big arms sweeping the pompous mayor into a huddled heap on the floor. The pounding gun had rent its first bullet smashing into a dresser mirror that shattered to bits.

At that, Dude Kellow moved quickly enough. He knew death when he saw it coming, and he dived, striking the knees of Chalmers with a disconcerting tackle.

But the farmer's foot lifted and kicked Kellow free. His revolver once more came around with deadly aim. Quick Trigger had been jostled aside by Mayor Van Royston's unexpected intervention. The old man tried to reach Chalmers, but saw he would be too late to save Kellow.

Swish!

A metal object fanned the air, coming from the open hallway door. If its direction had carried it directly upon Chalmers' skull, the bone would have been split. It was a thrown gun, a police automatic.

Crunk! the metal sounded as it caught Chalmers' head a glancing blow, whirling him halfway around. For the second time, his revolver exploded harmlessly. The big farmer sagged a little, but recovered, swinging toward the doorway.

FIGHTING Wildcat Gordon himself, in all the glory of a loudly checkered suit, was leaving the floor with a straight jump from his toes. Chalmers pulled the revolver trigger and it seemed that the gun exploded directly in Wildcat's face. A new army hat whirled off with a piece chewed out of its brim.

Wildcat's fists lashed out in a double seesaw of crossfire blows. The knuckles cut the massive jaw of the flower farmer, lifted him from his heels and sent him down. Wildcat pinned him with a hard knee in his stomach, and Mayor Van Royston cried out, "Gordon! Great guns! Don't kill—"

For Wildcat was smashing consciousness from the farmer's brain with a straight blow that drove his head down upon the floor. Chalmers groaned, and his arms dropped limply.

Steel clicked suddenly. Wildcat had jerked the farmer's wrists together and snapped on the handcuffs. Then Wildcat arose, wiped powder burn smoke from his eyes and turned with a hard grin. Mayor Van Royston was staring at him with popping eyes.

"Gordon! What are you doing?" demanded the mayor. "I know he was mad! But this can be hushed up! Why, I've known Chalmers for—"

"Sure!" grated Wildcat. "You've known Arthur Chalmers for a couple of years! But you didn't know you had the pleasure of being a bosom friend of a man who ought to have been murdered, but was not—Royal Campano."

Mayor Van Royston choked out, "Gordon, you're crazy! Why, you yourself admitted that Campano was killed by a man named Kellow, and Kellow died in the wreck of—"

"Certainly, your honor! I often admit a helluva lot of things! But have a look at Dude Kellow himself in person! That's why your friend Chalmers was so determined to kill him after he unexpectedly knocked him loose from his disguise! And have a look at this, your honor!"

Wildcat's ruthless hands tore off the shirt sleeve of Arthur Chalmers. A livid, ugly, pointed halfmoon burn showed on the left forearm. Chalmers was mumbling, and Wildcat ripped his shirt from across his shoulders. There was an odd white mark just below the base of his neck,

"Royal Campano was a hunchback, and there's where he carried the pack that made him look

deformed," stated Wildcat. "Some mobsters have used the double identity racket, but Royal Campano reversed the order. He established himself as a respectable farmer, a friend of the worthy mayor, before he became the hunchbacked racketeer. His chief lieutenant is dead outside the window, and your friend Chalmers killed him as soon as his daughter was free of the hypnotic spell."

Wildcat did not explain that the condition of Clara Chalmers and the hypnotism of The Whisperer's dog, Brian Boru, by Deuce Dimon had been his first real lead to Campano's identity.

Now Wildcat spread a paper upon the dresser. It contained seven names and seven thumbprints.

"It would have been cleaned up quicker if Campano had been on record, but I could not make sure of his thumbprint until tonight," said Wildcat. "But I have the thumbprint of Chalmers on a wax paper that had been around rose sprouts he handled. It cinched the identity, for it is Campano's thumbprint."

MAYOR VAN ROYSTON shook his head. He was staring at Tiny Traeger. It was the first time the mayor had seen Clara Chalmers' maid. Now the mayor saw that the old rose gardener was changing. White hair and a scrubby beard came from Quick Trigger's face and he stood there grinning.

"You see, Mayor Van Royston," explained Wildcat, "Clara Chalmers never knew her father to be other than he appeared. The night Campano formed his Half-Moon Brotherhood murder racket, he received a letter from his daughter saying she was coming home from a convent unexpectedly.

"Deuce Dimon got hold of a small piece of that letter. Later, he found the girl's handwriting in her room. Then he hypnotized the girl and that put Chalmers—or Campano—right where he wanted him. Deuce Dimon intended to bleed Campano to the limit and form a mob of his own.

"Campano had gotten his mail from the farm. He did not expect his daughter so soon, but since she was coming, he decided to dump everybody and live for her. He had enough money as Chalmers to take it easy, and his only interest was to kill Campano so there would be no possibility of tracing him."

Mayor Van Royston was shaking his head dubiously.

"You tell me you've cleaned out these half-mooners, Gordon," he stated. "But it is known The Whisperer was responsible for the first murders. Until you have found him—"

"Sometimes I don't believe there is a Whisperer," interrupted Wildcat. "Royal Campano murdered Ah Sun, Rafe Barton, Ranahan and Jon Stevens. You see, all had his confessions to murder, and in order to insure his own safety he was forced to attempt getting back the papers that had made the Half-Moon Brotherhood racket safe against any double-cross.

"If Deuce Dimon had not been too smart, and if several bits of evidence had not pointed to Dude Kellow being framed, Campano never need to have worried about the confessions. His identity of Arthur Chalmers was too perfect."

Clara Chalmers was being comforted by Tiny Traeger. The convent-bred girl had known her father only as a wealthy farmer. Dude Kellow had removed the shell from his other eye.

"From now on I think I shall take up farming," said Kellow.

"That's one way to keep the cops out of your hair," grinned Wildcat, "But I have an idea my department won't bother you much from now on. I think, young fellow, you have an idea that hasn't anything to do with farming."

Dude Kellow looked at Clara Chalmers and smiled.

"Humph!" came from the doll-like Tiny Traeger. "You would think that a police commissioner who is so smart would get an idea of his own!"

Wildcat Gordon pulled his bullet-torn army hat over one colorless eye and grinned a little. A police siren was wailing down the highway. He had already summoned Sergeant Thorsen and his squad.

"Someday, when you grow up, Tiny, maybe I'll find you a nice young fellow," said Wildcat.

"Make it anyone you can find," snapped Tiny. "Only don't let him be a copper!"

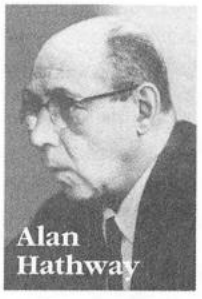
THE END

Laurence Donovan

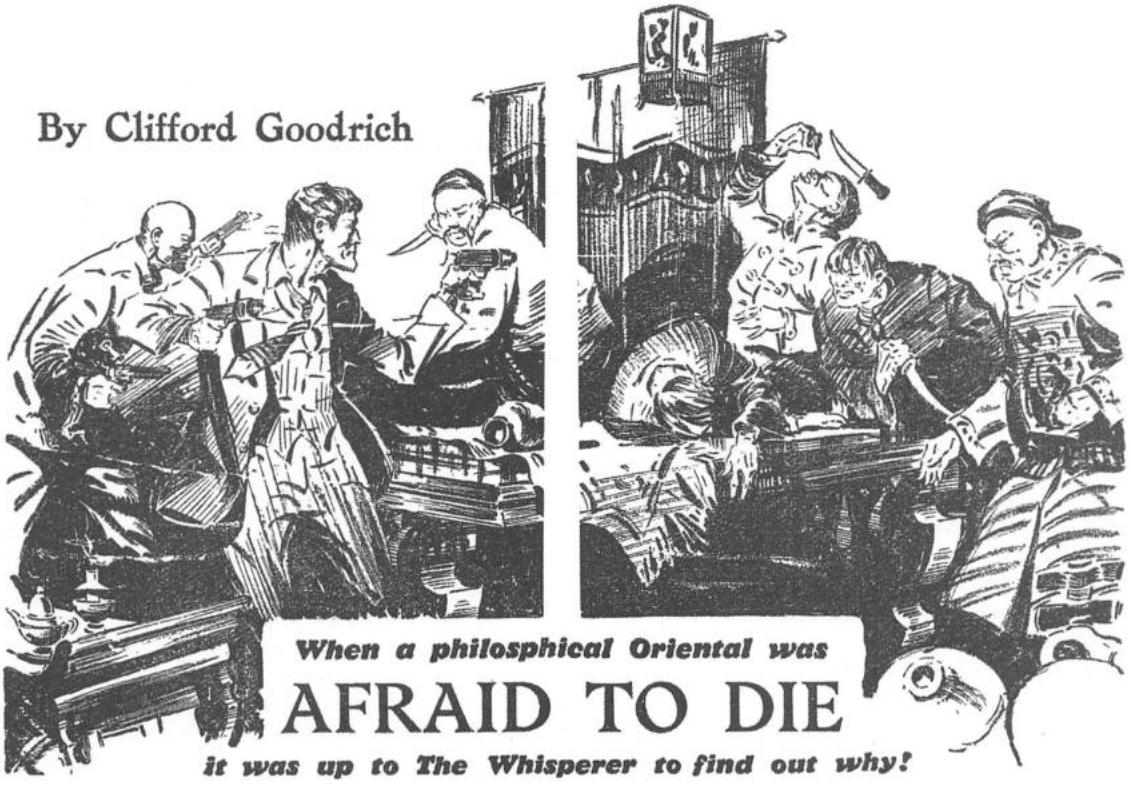
The Street & Smith house name "Clifford Goodrich" masked the identities of writers Laurence Donovan and Alan Hathway.

One of the most prolific wordsmiths of the era, Laurence Donovan (1885-1950) pounded out thrillers for a variety of pulps including *Argosy, The Shadow, Doc Savage, Phantom Detective* and *The Skipper,* along with the original 14-issue run of *The Whisperer*.

Alan Hathway (1906-1977) was a legendary American newspaperman. After stints at the Chicago *Herald-Examiner* and the New York *Daily News*, Hathway succeeded fellow Doc Savage ghost Harold A. Davis as managing editor of *Newsday.* He wrote most of the Whisperer shorts in *The Shadow* and the lead novels in the 1940-42 revival of *The Whisperer* magazine.


Alan Hathway

By Clifford Goodrich



When a philosphical Oriental was

AFRAID TO DIE

it was up to The Whisperer to find out why!

THE knife made no noise as it shot across the narrow street. It cut squarely through the center of a quaint, round-brimmed hat.

The man beneath the hat fell flat on the dirty cobblestones. Blood trickled from his head. But The Whisperer had ducked, perhaps instinctively, just enough to save his life.

There was a hissing, as if highly compressed air were being released. Lurid, blue flame spewed from The Whisperer's silenced automatics. The man who had thrown the knife screamed once. His feet pounded down a narrow alley. The feet staggered slightly. But the man got away.

The Whisperer struggled back to his own feet and knew it was high time he had returned to China Hill. The "supercrook" more feared and hated by crooks themselves than by the police, turned into an ancient doorway.

Murder had been stalking China Hill. Murder and a reported ruthless war to control the China lottery. But The Whisperer was sure it was something more than murder. Something that bound tight the tongues of honest men in Chinatown; that made them fear death with an immortal terror. And The Whisperer had returned to find out what that was.

He knocked three times on a heavy oaken door. A peephole snapped open. A slanted, Oriental eye surveyed D. Smith, the name by which The Whisperer was known in many quarters.

The Whisperer was not an impressive sight. He was a blurred, almost colorless figure. The chin was oddly pointed and outthrust, the hair a powdery whitish gray. The clothes, the hat were also gray.

The gray man uttered three words in the even-toned North China dialect of Peking. His voice was a hissing, penetrating tone. And yet had a husky note. It sent a shudder up the spine of the Oriental behind the door. But he swung the portal open.

D. Smith stepped into the room. China Hill knew D. Smith, knew the part he had played in breaking up the murderous plans of Ah Sun, who had ruled China Hill with crime. D. Smith was feared—too much for this Oriental to shut the door against him.

THE WHISPERER'S eyes ran swiftly around the room. The place was well filled. There were four tables of fantan. A venerable Chinese furtively counted the winnings of the lottery on an abacus.

The strangest thing was a tense atmosphere of fear. It was not natural in a carefree Chinese gambling house. The Chinese are quite fatalistic about their losses.

The eyes of the newcomer stopped on one face. It was a youthful face. The black eyes stared almost unseeingly. The young man shuddered. He was Hong Chui, son of Hong See, unofficial mayor of China Hill. The police believed Hong See was behind the fight to control the China lottery.

Before D. Smith got halfway across the room, there was a frantic pounding on the door. An Oriental outside it screamed in fear. Then heavy axes began chopping down the door.

The Whisperer cursed softly at the sight of two men who rushed in ahead of a squad of cops. The first man was a long-nosed unpleasant-looking fellow. He was Deputy Inspector Henry Bolton.

The second man was a red-faced, beetle-browed giant. He was bellowing in a foghorn voice as the two crowded in.

"I don't care if Commissioner Gordon doesn't want this joint raided!" he roared. "This lottery business is causing murders! I want it cleaned up—now!"

The second man was "Rent" Hagman, political boss of the Thirteenth Ward.

A strange thing happened as the two men burst into the gambling den. Perhaps the Chinese did not see the uniformed cops behind them. Bolton was in civilian clothes. They may not have recognized him.

The Chinese did not act like men caught in an ordinary gambling raid. There were high-pitched cries of fright and rage. Knives slid from loose Oriental sleeves. Guns roared deafeningly in the confines of the room. Rent Hagman spun around, blood dripping from his shoulder.

Henry Bolton dropped flat on the floor. Most of Henry Bolton's valor was in his nasal voice. He had two overpowering ambitions. One was to displace "Wildcat" Gordon as police commissioner. The other was to arrest The Whisperer and gloat at him behind the bars. He was spectacularly unsuccessful in both of these ambitions.

The cops behind the two men had more nerve than Bolton. Their guns flashed, spat flame and lead. They were no doubt surprised that Chinese gamblers would resist a routine raid with death-dealing bullets. But they were ready for that eventuality.

D. Smith—The Whisperer—faded. He could serve no purpose lingering here. He knew that if Henry Bolton seized him, both of that worthy's ambitions would be realized in a single stroke. For The Whisperer was Wildcat Gordon!

The gray, blurry man drifted toward the rear of the gambling room. He saw one Chinese go down with a bullet through his forehead. The man was very dead. He was Hong Chui, son of the unofficial Mayor of China Hill.

The gray figure stretched out one arm as he passed the desk where the venerable Chinese had been counting on the abacus. The old man was on the floor. Beneath the abacus lay a sheaf of papers. They were the records of the lottery syndicate.

The Whisperer's hand snatched those papers up and he faded beyond the rear door of the room. Perhaps they would give him some information that he needed.

He took three steps down a dimly lit hallway. The hall turned to the right. The Whisperer padded softly along. A door opened quietly behind him and he felt the hard, round hole of a revolver thrust into his ribs.

THE WHISPERER turned, slowly. The fist that was tightly clenched around the gun butt was small and feminine. The girl above the fist was as tense as she was diminutive. The eyes were only faintly slanting. The face was oval, fascinatingly beautiful in an odd, elusive manner. She seemed to have the vibrant vitality of an American girl, blended with the mystery of the Orient.

She was Lotus Hong, half-caste sister of the man The Whisperer had just seen slain. Her eyes widened as The Whisperer turned around. Her mouth made a startled "O".

"The Smith!" she exclaimed. "You have returned to China Hill! I thought you were—"

The girl seemed to falter. Fear replaced the grim determination that had been in her eyes. She knew that D. Smith, The Whisperer, had proved a friend of the honest men of China Hill. She knew he had been the only one able to cope with the villainy of Ah Sun in his murderous opium-smoking dive.

The girl looked furtively behind her. Then she spoke softly, choosing her words with care.

"You have been a friend, D. Smith," she whispered. "I will trust you. Perhaps you can help—"

Whatever the girl might have planned to say was never finished. A huge hand reached out from the doorway through which she had come, seized her about the waist. In that same instant, the lights went out.

The Whisperer's silenced automatics were in his hands in a fraction of a second.

But he had no chance to use them. The floor suddenly gave way beneath him. He felt himself plunging through the inky blackness. It seemed to The Whisperer that he fell for many minutes. There was a sweetly cloying odor in the air. It was not that of opium, it was more like chloroform. He was only vaguely conscious of landing with a thud on a padded floor.

His brain began to whirl. He felt like a tiny man bound to a huge, whirling disk. The disk whirled him into a pit of mental blackness.

As The Whisperer slipped into unconsciousness, his mind turned to things he knew of the terror of China Hill. Stalwart Chinese were afraid of something it appeared they could not understand. Old men had become afraid to die.

It is well known that an honest Chinese is unafraid of death. He purchases his coffin long before he intends to go. He will often keep it in his parlor, where he can view it with a warmth of possessive pride.

The Chinese is not afraid of death. He looks upon the coffin as a new home he has purchased, one in which he will sometime live in the serene enjoyment of joining the ancestors who have gone before him.

But China Hill was afraid to die!

WHEN consciousness returned to The Whisperer,

he was in a dimly curtained room. The odor of incense was heavy in the air. The Whisperer was bound at the wrists and the ankles. He lay on the floor. This was not the pit into which he had fallen.

A tall Manchu stood before him. His hands were tucked into his sleeves. Hong See, China Hill's unofficial mayor, was a huge man for a Chinese, even for a Manchu of North China. His eyes were hard, bright unrevealing buttons.

He stared for a moment into the eyes of The Whisperer. They were very different eyes from those of the Chinese. They were neither gray nor blue. They were eyes washed out by sun and wind. Hong See might have realized those eyes have been known for generations as native of the Texas plains. Or, Hong See might not have known.

"You have been brought to the Den of the Nineteen Dragons, the Smith," Hong See purred. "It is not for you to involve yourself in the affairs of China Hill."

The men surrounding Hong See were tense. They leaned forward, expectant—as if they waited for the order to kill this prisoner.

The Whisperer's eyes roved about the curtained room. He saw the photo of an ancient Chinese on one wall. It was a picture of the father of Hong See, one of the first residents of China Hill. The Whisperer emitted a ghostly exclamation of surprise.

He knew the father of Hong See had fled from China Hill. He had fled to the hills of old Peking to die among his ancestors. He had died there—a suicide!

The picture was draped in flowing silk of royal blue. The Whisperer knew what that meant. He knew the beliefs of old China. He knew the superstition, that a suicide cannot progress to the First Paradise of the three Chinese heavens until the one who caused his suicide also dies; or until his family has avenged the suicide.

Until that time, the picture must be draped in blue.

The Whisperer knew that. And he knew that the terror of China Hill had caused the old man to flee. There was more here than a mere fight for the China lottery. A great deal more.

THE tenseness of the room was suddenly broken by a staccato barking. It was as if some small dog was demanding entrance to the Den of the Nineteen Dragons. At the same time, there came an insistent knocking at the door.

The Whisperer moved, even as the Chinese started toward the door. Wrists that had been greased before he entered China Hill slid from the bonds that held him; ankle ropes were thrown off. The door was opened and what looked like a gaunt, bald-headed Chinaman leaped into the room.

The bald-headed Chinese held two amazing guns. They were six-shooters that looked the caliber of naval guns. They began booming like an artillery barrage as the gaunt, bald man entered.

His first shots went toward the ceiling. Apparently, he hadn't made up his mind who was friend or who was foe. Behind him raced a small bundle of black, angry fur. It was an energetic Scottish terrier.

The Whisperer was on his feet. His two automatics flashed in his hands. The two moves had been so quick, so completely unexpected, that the Chinese in the room were taken by surprise. One slid a knife from his sleeve. The Whisperer's guns hissed and the knife dropped from bloody fingers.

The Whisperer glided toward a light switch, flicked it out. His guns hissed once in warning. Then he slid quietly out the door. The gaunt, bald man and the dog were with him. The dog whined anxiously.

"Quiet, Brian Boru!" The Whisperer ordered. The dog fell silent. He worshipped The Whisperer.

"Dammitall, Wildcat," the bald man muttered, "I don't like this a-tall! You ought to lock the whole shebang up! Then we'd get to the bottom of this thing."

The Chinese-appearing man was Richard Traeger, a retired deputy commissioner of police, with whom Wildcat Gordon made his home. He was better known as old "Quick Trigger". He was the only man alive who knew Wildcat Gordon was The Whisperer.

He should have known. A master of disguises, he had made the odd dental plates which gave the square-jawed Wildcat the odd, pointed chin and the whispering voice that chilled the nerves of crooks. Frequently, Quick Trigger regretted having made those plates.

The Whisperer was the only "crook" that Wildcat Gordon was steadily unable to catch.

When The Whisperer had gone to China Hill he had left instructions with Quick Trigger to follow him to the gambling den. If there was trouble, he was to go into the den. If he did not find The Whisperer, he would go to Hong See. It was only logical that the unofficial mayor of the section would know something of what was going on. And Quick Trigger suspected Hong See, anyway.

Brian Boru's keen nose had done the rest. Quick Trigger had known The Whisperer was inside when the dog began to bark.

"That Hong See is a smooth one, Wildcat," Quick Trigger said. "We ought to nab him."

The Whisperer did not answer. He led the way quickly to a small gray coupé parked in a deserted section of the street. He stepped in and Quick Trigger followed. The door closed behind him.

THE two men were not in the coupé more than a moment of two. The men who stepped out were entirely different.

The round-brimmed hat of The Whisperer had disappeared. Instead, an army hat was pulled jauntily down over one of Wildcat Gordon's eyes. A quick movement had turned the powdery white hair into a bristling, reddish hue. A bright-red carnation gleamed in his button hole. Gray spats removed left a pair of bright yellow shoes. The dental plates were out now and the hard, square jaw of Wildcat Gordon showed his years of army training.

The man who was with him was still bald. But he was hardly an Oriental. He had deep, peering eyes. He craned his neck forward as if he were nearsighted. But Quick Trigger was not nearsighted, and he usually found what he was looking for.

Wildcat Gordon strode to the entrance of the gambling den. There was a cop at the door. He stuttered to attention as Wildcat strode up.

"Anything touched since the raid?" Wildcat snapped.

"N-no, sir," the cop stammered. "There's about six dead guys up there!"

As Wildcat burst into the room, he discovered that the cop was wrong. Perhaps there *had* been six bodies in the room. But there were none in there now. Everyone had disappeared as completely as if there had been no killings there at all!

The cop's eyes bulged from his head.

"Whew!" he muttered. "There'll sure be hell to pay for that!"

"There already has been hell to pay," Wildcat snapped. "And plenty more to come!"

He left the building with old Quick Trigger. He was surer now than ever that his first hunch had been correct. He saw a dirty racket that was far worse than a lottery. The lottery could be cleaned up after The Whisperer had done his work on something more important.

He and Quick Trigger stood under a street lamp. Slowly, Wildcat outlined his plan. He did not speak of himself. He spoke only of D. Smith, The Whisperer. Quick Trigger's brow wrinkled into a worried frown.

"I don't like it, Wildcat," he complained. "You can't get away with that. Something'll happen sure! I wish I'd never made those dental plates."

"It will work," Wildcat insisted.

But Wildcat Gordon might not have been so sure, if he had seen the face of Lotus Hong. She was flattened in the shadow of a building. She heard every word, then scuttled off in the darkness.

BEFORE Commissioner Wildcat Gordon disappeared again, he had one or two things to attend to. One of them was Henry Bolton.

"Henry," he roared at his subordinate, "if you pull one more raid that I haven't ordered, I'll have you pounding the pavements!"

Henry Bolton sniveled. He seemed on the verge of wiping his nose on the sleeve of his coat. Bolton secretly hoped that by playing up to various politicians, he would get Wildcat's job. He had been trying to impress Rent Hagman.

Rent Hagman, who had won his name and most of his money by being the No. 1 landlord of early China Hill, stood in the room. He defended Bolton, but admitted Wildcat Gordon was right.

"I don't like this string of murders, commissioner," he complained. "If the lottery racket is at the bottom of it, I want it wiped out."

Wildcat Gordon nodded. He knew Rent Hagman had been strict in making the denizens of China Hill keep on the honest side of the law. Hagman had dabbled in the numbers racket himself, but he knew no white man could run the China lottery. The Chinese would not trust a white racketeer.

Hagman had kept his hands strictly off the China lottery. And he didn't intend it to take money from the Chinese who needed it to pay rentals to him.

Wildcat left police headquarters after a terse word of warning to Henry Bolton. He found old Quick Trigger waiting for him in the coupé on the street below.

"All set?" Wildcat asked.

Quick Trigger groaned.

"Dammitall, Wildcat," he spluttered. "The Whisperer is bad enough. But The Whisperer imitatin' some darned Chink is worse!"

Wildcat Gordon did not reply. He climbed into the coupé and let Quick Trigger start on what was probably the greatest piece of makeup that had ever come from his skilled hands. It had to be a masterpiece.

THE neighbors of Sun Wong might have been surprised that he had come back so soon from Chicago. Sun Wong would have been surprised himself.

Fortunately, The Whisperer knew the habits of old Sun Wong. He thought he knew all of them. He had made a careful study of Sun Wong's habits. The Whisperer knew the old man well. He was an importer of tea and spices. Sun Wong was wealthy.

The Whisperer may have also known that Sun Wong had enemies. He may have known those enemies intended to kill Sun Wong. The Chinese was a slightly built man. The Whisperer's shoulders drooped as he padded through China Hill in the robes of Sun Wong.

The bent figure turned into Poppy Street. The business establishment and dwelling of Sun Wong was a scant hundred yards ahead. The Whisperer

had been in the home of Sun Wong within the last hour. The servants had been completely fooled. They believed The Whisperer was Sun Wong.

The Whisperer's intention of going back into the home of his absent Chinese friend was suddenly thwarted. A dark figure glided from the shadows of a nearby warehouse. A gun glinted darkly in his hand. The gun roared twice before The Whisperer had a chance to reach for his automatics.

The Whisperer staggered. A moan came from his lips. Drops of red dribbled from his mouth. The bent figure doubled, fell to the sidewalk. A red pool spread. The figure writhed once or twice. Then it was still and silent.

A hoarse chuckle came from the shadows and feet padded off into the night.

THERE was great excitement in the household of Sun Wong. The importer had been a good employer. His help had been fairly treated. High-pitched screams rose into the night as the smocked Chinese rushed from the building.

They looked furtively up and down the street. Then they picked up the pliant body, carried it into the jade-and-copper living room that had been the pride of old Sun Wong.

The servants whispered among themselves. They had explicit instructions from old Sun Wong. The importer had been venerable. He knew not when he might die. The rosewood coffin had long stood in an honored place in Sun Wong's dwelling.

The servants bobbed their heads. Yes, it must be done as Sun Wong had ordered. The veneration of the dead is great to the upright Chinese. Old Sun Wong's instructions had been very much to the point.

The servants placed the body in the rosewood coffin. They were sad about their task. They were performing an unhappy duty.

Just before midnight, Hong See and his daughter called upon the household. Both showed the effect of nervous strain. Lotus Hong's dark eyes darted furtively about her. Hong stood silent for a moment beside the body in the coffin.

"An honored friend is gone," he said slowly. "Let us hope he joins his ancestors in peace."

Hong and his daughter left then. The tall Manchu seemed stooped in sorrow and worry.

Far into the night, the servants huddled about the coffin. Incense burned in the room. The lights were turned quite low. It was an eerie scene of honoring the remains of old Sun Wong.

But the scene was interrupted. It was broken in a harsh, brutal burst of shots. The front doors of Sun Wong's house was broken in. Heavy leather heels pounded up the stairs. They were not the soft, padded footsteps of Chinese.

The gunmen who plunged into the room were hard-faced, scarred mobsters. They began shooting ruthlessly. One of the servants doubled, fell to the floor in death. The others scattered.

"Drill any Chink you see!" the leader of the gang rasped. "They're a dime a dozen, anyway!"

The leader peered into the coffin. His unshaven face twisted into an ugly leer. He turned a light on, so he could see more clearly.

"It's the right guy," he croaked. "This is what the boss wants done."

The thugs found the heavy lid for the rosewood coffin. They set it in place, screwed it down tightly. Then, an irreverent and murderous group of pall-bearers, they carried the coffin to the street.

An ordinary delivery truck served as a hearse. It rumbled heavily over the streets.

THE WHISPERER was not dead. He had forced himself into a state of catalepsy after Quick Trigger had fired those blank cartridges at him.

The trick of autohypnosis had been taught Wildcat Gordon by an Indian fakir. But the untutored servants of old Sun Wong had not doubted their master was dead. No breath had seemed to come from their master's lips. And the heart did not seem to beat.

The Whisperer used a system of posthypnotic suggestions to awaken himself from the self-imposed trance. He could not have awakened, had he wanted to, until long after the mobsters had screwed down the heavy lid, making a prison of the coffin.

But The Whisperer would not have tried to regain consciousness before that. He wished Sun Wong thought dead. He opened his eyes now, drowsily, in the blackness of the coffin. He could feel the truck jouncing over rough-paved streets.

Then the truck ground to a halt. Rough hands seized the rosewood box. They were not particular about the comfort of the dead man. They figured he wouldn't feel it anyway.

But The Whisperer did feel it. He stiffened his neck to keep it from breaking, as the box was hurled to the street. The Whisperer landed on his head.

The thugs cursed, and hauled the box into some sort of building. The Whisperer heard doors close behind them. They clambered down a flight of stairs, grumbled at the unwieldiness of the box. Then they set it down.

Another door swung shut and The Whisperer was in silence as well as darkness.

The Whisperer came to life then. He propped himself up in his tiny prison. A vial burst in his hands. A colorless liquid began to spread at one end of the rosewood box. It was hydrochloric acid, the fiery liquid used in making pulpwood. It dissolved the fiber.

Acrid fumes came from the end of the rosewood box. The Whisperer dabbed a handkerchief to his

nose. He would not live long with those fumes swirling around him. But he did not have long to wait. The acid ate through the soft rosewood like water dissolving a piece of blotting paper.

The Whisperer kicked a hard leather heel. A gaping hole appeared. In an instant, The Whisperer was out of the box. With one quick motion, he inserted his queer dental plates into his jaw. He had not used them while masquerading as the ancient Sun Wong.

A ghostly chuckle floated through the darkness. The walls of some small chamber reflected the voice back to its owner. The Whisperer flicked on a tiny flashlight.

Then his ghostly chuckle came again. There was triumph in it now. He found himself in a small underground chamber. The coffin lay on a bench. But beside it was another coffin. The Whisperer peered into this one.

He found the cold, dead body of Hong Chui, son of the imperious Mayor Hong See of China Hill! It was Hong Chui, brother of Lotus Hong; the one whom D. Smith had seen drilled the night before in the gambling den on China Hill.

THE body of Hong Chui had been the one thing The Whisperer had come for. But he had also come for something else.

He slung the youth's body over his shoulder and headed toward the door. The door was locked. But The Whisperer's selection of skeleton keys would have been the envy of any locksmith.

In a moment, he was padding softly up the stairs. He had thrown off the robes of old Sun Wong. He was now clad in gray. A dab of powder had restored the whitishness to his hair.

The ghost of Sun Wong would have given the mobsters a severe case of nervousness. But the appearance of The Whisperer was even more impressive.

The gray-clad figure came upon the hoodlums in a large room above the coffin chamber. He wasted no time with introductions.

"Elevate your hands!" the husky, eerie voice commanded. "The Whisperer speaks! And he speaks but once!"

One of the thugs made a mistake. Perhaps he believed The Whisperer would speak a second time. The thug hauled out his gun.

But The Whisperer did not speak. His two automatics hissed death for the mobster. There were five other men in the room. They all began to shoot at once. It seemed to them that there were a dozen gray-clad Whisperers in the room. The figure weaved and twisted in the dim light.

Not one slug of the gunmen found its mark. But The Whisperer's slugs went home. Three of the killers fell. They rolled in pools of blood from their own arteries. The remaining two fled, screaming. One of them had presence of mind enough to stop and pull a lever.

"Boss'll kill us if we don't do this!" he muttered. And he raced out into the street.

A dull explosion sounded in the cellar. The place was instantly a mass of flames. Whatever evidence was in that house would soon be a pile of ashes.

The Whisperer chuckled hoarsely. He slung the body of Hong See's son over his shoulder again and padded into the street.

The gray man paused only once to note the number of the house he was leaving. He knew the number. And it told him one more thing he had to know. He knew now who owned the building. In a moment more, he had blended into the shadows of the night.

The thugs did not see him emerge. They may have thought he perished in the flames.

No one saw The Whisperer again that night.

WILDCAT GORDON pounded up the steps of police headquarters. The bright red carnation fairly bristled in his buttonhole. The look of relief on the face of old Quick Trigger was something rare to see.

"Wildcat!" he shouted, and gripped both hands of the police commissioner. Quick Trigger acted as if he had not seen his friend in years. It *had* seemed years to old Quick Trigger.

"Quick!" Wildcat snapped. "We raid the Den of the Nineteen Dragons within ten minutes. Even then, we may not be in time."

Wildcat Gordon's streamlined car whirred over the streets like an avenging Juggernaut. The siren whined, wide open, for the first few blocks. Then Wildcat cut it off.

"Don't want to scare our quarry," he explained. "He might blow if he knows we're coming."

Wildcat tooled the car down through Poppy Street and around the corner. It squealed to a stop before the imposing headquarters of the Den of the Nineteen Dragons, the most powerful society on China Hill.

The commissioner's yellow shoes glinted under the street lamps, as Wildcat plunged up the stairs. He didn't stop to knock at the door of the Dragon's Den. He plunged into the door with shoulders that would have made a gridiron fullback green with envy.

The door splintered as if it had been matchwood. A curious group whirled as Wildcat burst in among them.

The solemn face of Hong See was impassive. It hid whatever thoughts he might have had. Lotus Hong screamed in terror. Half a dozen Chinese hatchet men stood transfixed. It seemed they dared not move.

In the center of the room towered the huge form

of Rent Hagman. His face was livid with an overpowering rage. He sneered at Wildcat Gordon, then turned back to Hong See.

"Tell this tin-horn copper he isn't wanted," Hagman rasped. "Tell him everything is O.K. with you!"

Hong See's face showed a flicker of fear. His eyes looked once at Wildcat. Then they dropped to the floor.

"Everything—" he began.

"Wait!" rapped Wildcat. "Hagman is a liar! I knew he'd come here to see if you had told me anything about this business. He has told you that if you do not keep your mouth shut you will never get the body of your son. Hagman lies! I have Hong Chui's body. And you will get it back!"

RENT HAGMAN snarled. He ripped out an oath and an order. In an instant, the room was filled with gunmen. They crowded through the door like ants. Their guns were spitting flame and lead.

But Hong See spoke then, in high-pitched Pekingese. The hatchet men lost their lethargic fear. They went into action. Hatchets appeared in long-nailed hands. They whirred through the air. Old Quick Trigger's cannons began to boom. Police Positives in Wildcat's hands exploded with rhythmic precision. The carnage was more than the mobsters had bargained for. Few of them escaped at all. And those were rounded up later.

Rent Hagman dived for the door. A slug tore through his thigh, brought him down. One of Hagman's own thugs whirled as he passed the political boss.

"You said it was a safe racket, rat!" he growled.

Blam!

The thug's parting shot was a bullet through the brain of his boss.

Wildcat turned to Hong See.

"Snatching corpses seemed a safe racket for these birds," he said evenly. "There's nothing in the Lindbergh Law covering that. And they didn't use the mails for their extortion.

"But I remembered the fear many Chinese have of not being buried. If possible, they must be buried in the soil of China. But under soil, at any rate. Otherwise, their spirits may not join their ancestors. I knew, last night, that the gamblers were shooting at Hagman, not Henry Bolton. I had to find out why they feared and hated him.

"And I also knew the gang would be quick to snatch the body of as wealthy a Chinese as old Sun Wong."

Hong See lowered his head an instant.

"I feared to speak," he muttered. Then he walked to the picture of his own father on the wall. Slowly, he withdrew the blue silk drape. "The spirit has been avenged," he said. "It was fear of Hagman's body-snatching that drove him back to China. His apparent lack of courage in running away caused him to commit suicide."

Only one person in the room still seemed troubled. It was the doe-eyed Lotus Hong. She approached Wildcat uncertainly.

"You have been wonderful, Commissioner Gordon," she whispered. "But—the Smith. I know you sent him. He burned up in that house?"

The girl's eyes were mourning for a man she knew was a friend. Wildcat's eyes were kind.

"Perhaps it is a good thing if The Whisperer is out of the way," he said. "But, somehow, I doubt that he really is."

Quick Trigger snorted.

"No," he muttered, "I couldn't have that much luck!"

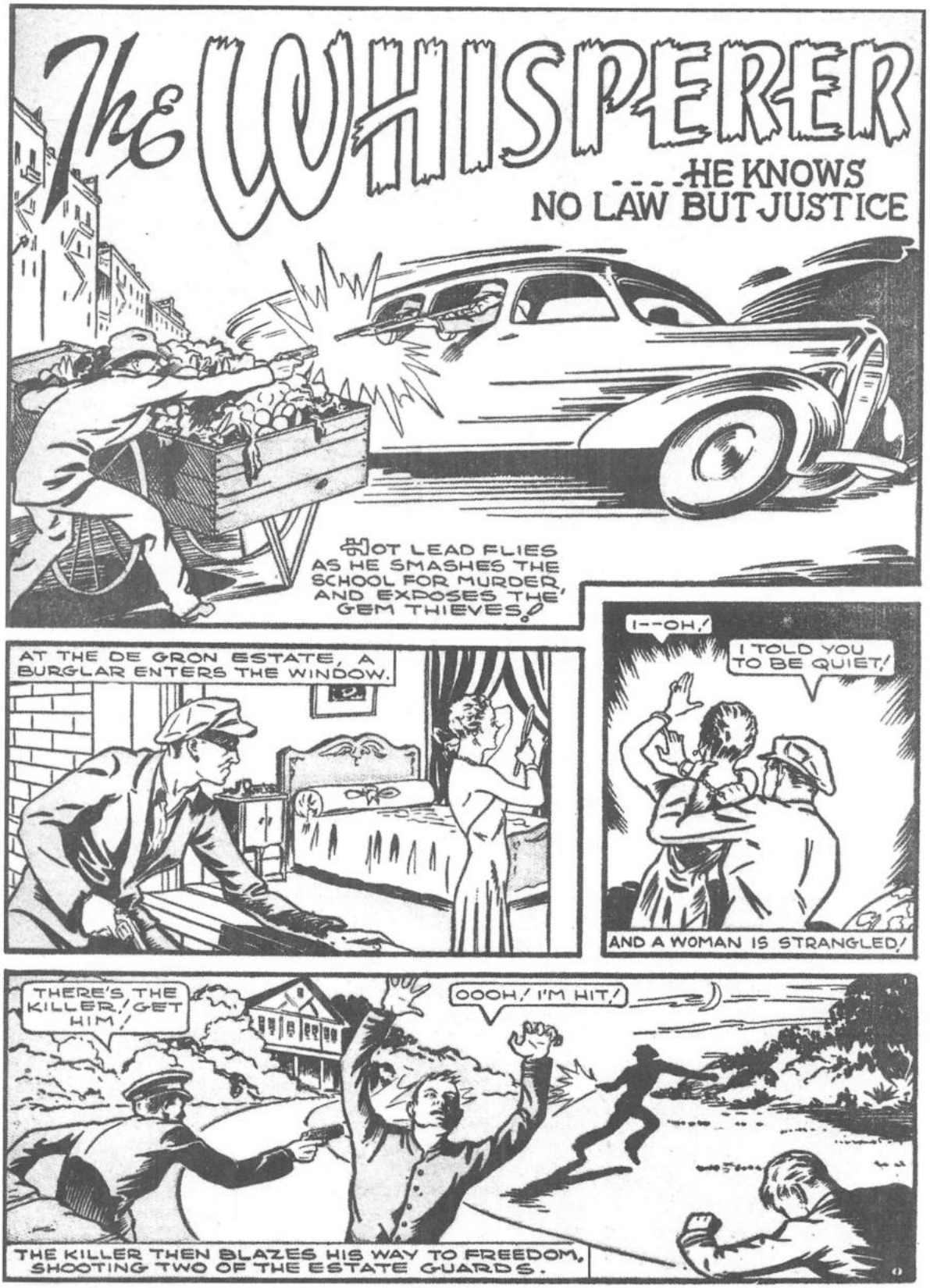
THE END

Doc Savage Comics #1 debuted on newsstands 75 years ago on April 21st, 1940, continuing the Man of Bronze's and Cap Fury's four-color adventures from the back pages of *Shadow Comics*, and presenting the comic book debuts of such veteran pulp heroes as The Whisperer, Pete Rice and Walter Gibson's Norgil the Magician.

The Whisperer's comic book debut, illustrated by Gus Ricca and reprinted here for the first time, was adapted from the 1937 novel, *The School for Murder*, reissued in *The Whisperer* volume 5.

"Norgil and the Lion" was adapted by Walter B. Gibson and British born artist Jon Small (Green Hornet and Bulletman) from "The Lady and the Lion," first published in the January 1940 issue of *Mystery Magazine* and reprinted in *The Whisperer* volume 4.

The comic book careers of Norgil and The Whisperer were shortlived. Norgil made four comic book appearances, while the Whisperer was featured in only two Street & Smith comic book adaptations, though his alter ego of Commissioner James Gordon was appropriated by Bill Finger as Batman's police liaison.



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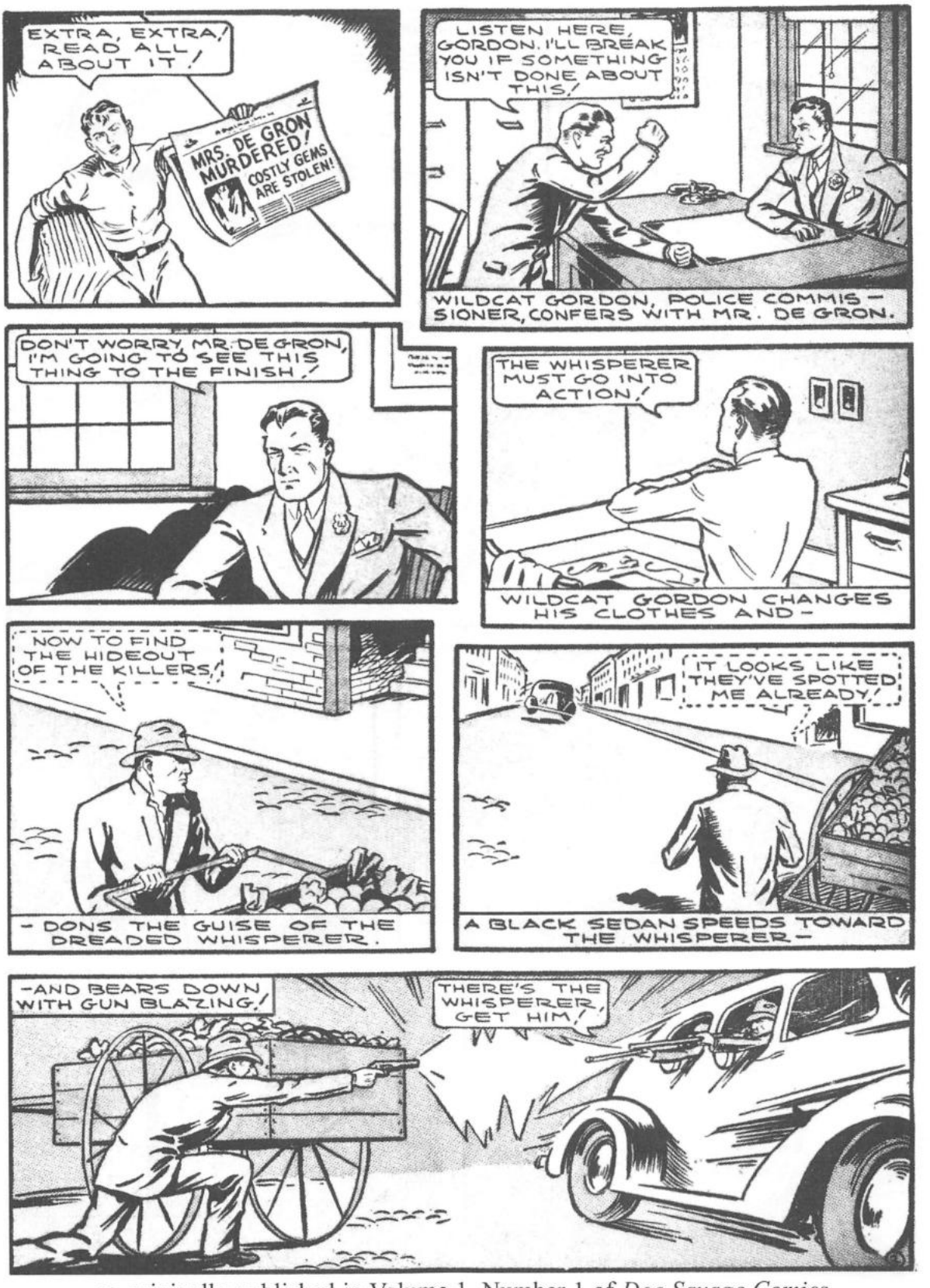

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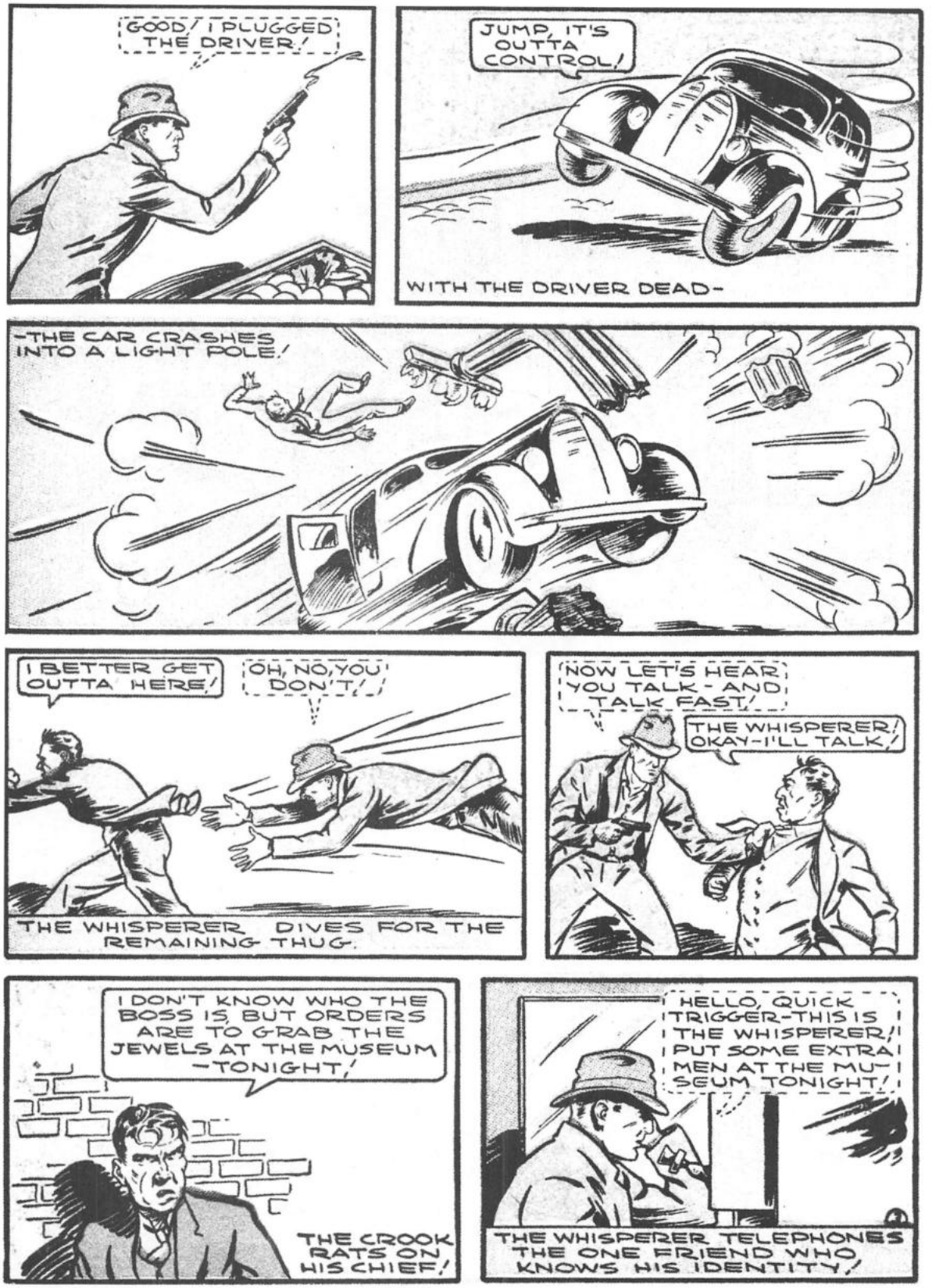

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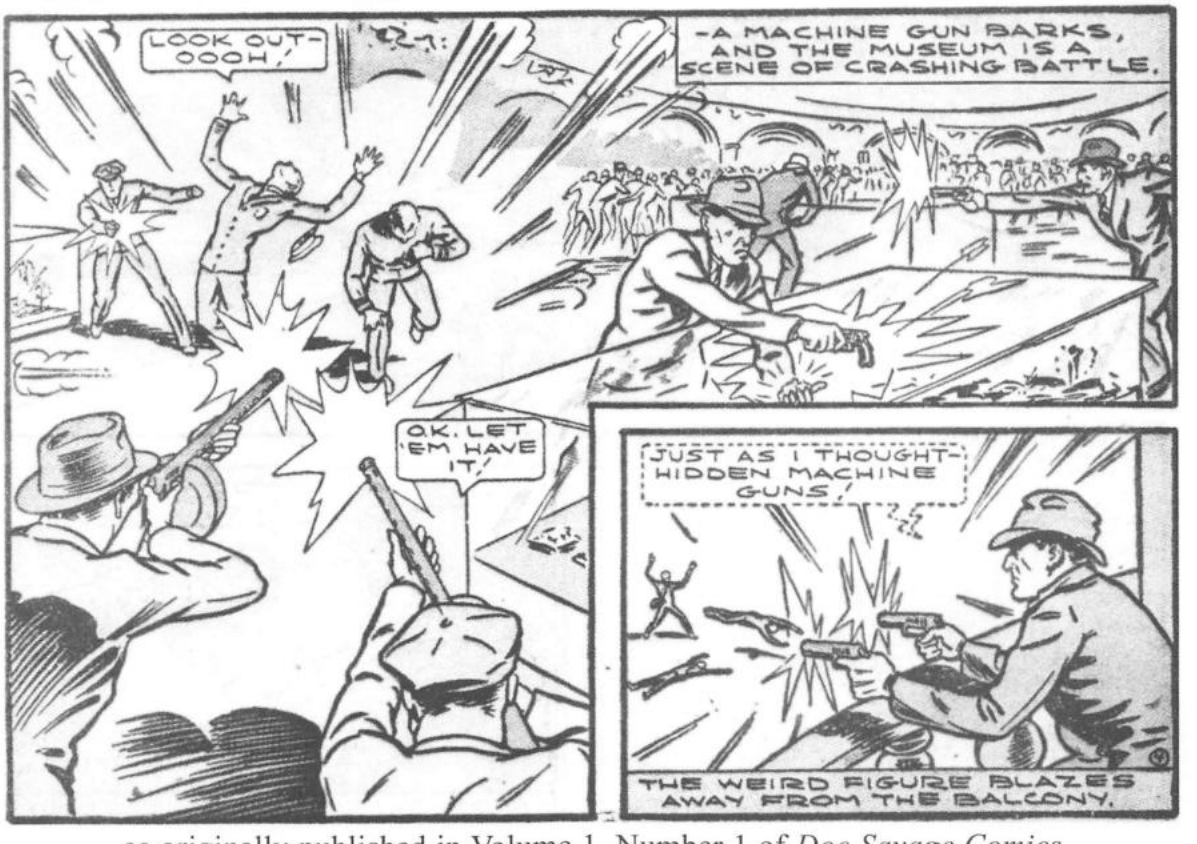

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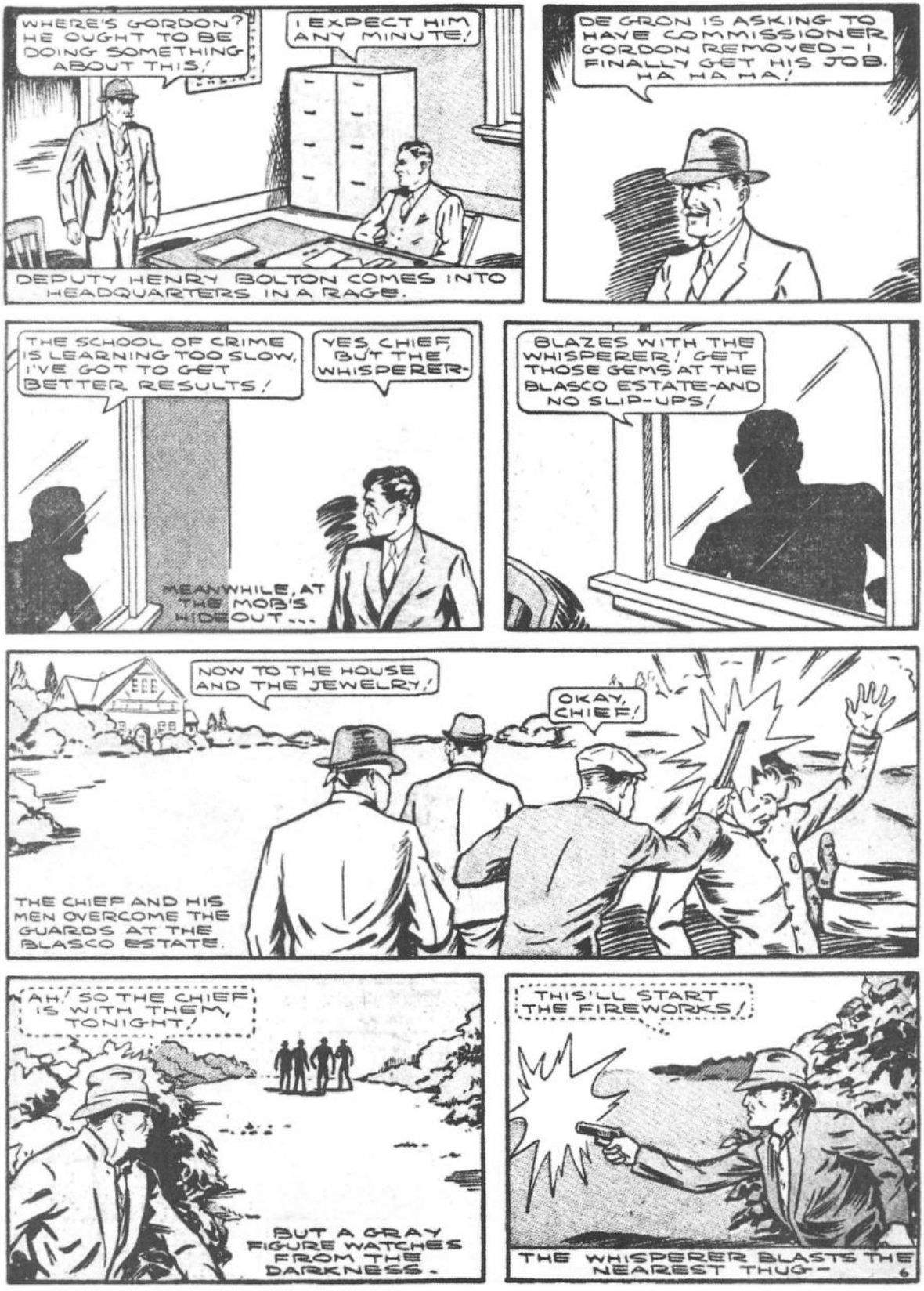

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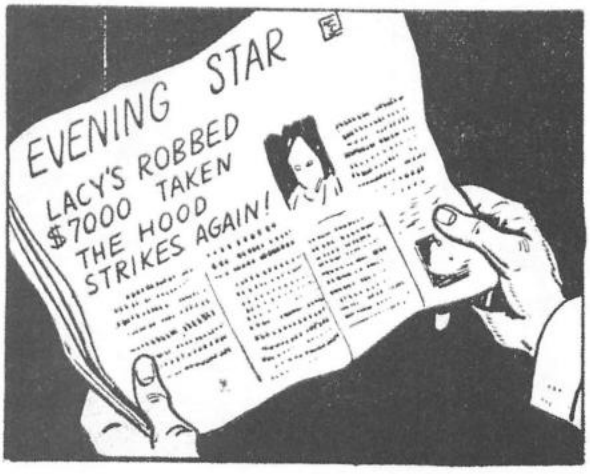

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